

THE TRACK OF A STORM

OWEN HALL





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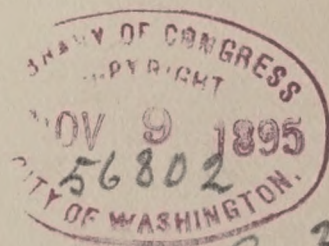
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THE TRACK OF A STORM

BY

OWEN HALL

Lusk, H.



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PART I.

THE GATHERING CLOUDS.

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OF LONDON, BANKER, DECEASED.

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PART I.

THE GATHERING CLOUDS.

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LONDON, BANKER, DECEASED.

CHAPTER I.

THIS is my birthday. I am sixty-five years old to-day. Not a great age, certainly. My family have always made a practice of living a good deal longer than that, so that I might reasonably expect another ten years or so of life at any rate. I don't say I don't expect it, either. I only say my doctor is of a different opinion. He was here to-day, and told me not to look forward to another birthday. He may be right, of course. Fortunately, it is just about as likely he is wrong. Perhaps, after all, it doesn't matter very much. I am quite alone in the world, and outside the bank I have very few interests. In the bank I suspect they begin to look on me as an old foggy. The name isn't complimentary—though why old foggy should be less pleasant than old man I don't know,—but the thing is common enough. Perhaps I am. I dare say if the

doctor should turn out to be right, the bank will get on very well without me. I feel sure I should not get on very well without the bank. If I have grown useless there, I can't be of much use anywhere. If I am not wanted at the bank, it would puzzle me to say where I am wanted.

My life has been far from eventful. How on earth should it be, I should like to know, when it has been tied to the bank for forty-five years? Looking back now, I can only recall a single incident in the whole of it which was either startling or remarkable, and that didn't happen until two years ago. Perhaps other people wouldn't consider even that remarkable, but at any rate I do, or I shouldn't take the trouble of writing it down. If other people had been as close to the event as I was, it might have struck them differently. If they had been in my place, they might have thought it remarkable, too. This is what happened: I was robbed on the King's highway, in the year of Grace 1832, of a hundred and twenty-five pounds and a diamond ring, and in the following year I secured the conviction of the man accused of the robbery and of murder committed at the same time. The man was sentenced to be hanged, but in the end he was only transported for life. I am glad now that he was not hanged. At the time I thought it a failure of justice, and I said so. Now it takes a weight off my mind, and I don't mind confessing it.

The man was convicted on my evidence, and I was never more sure of anybody in my life than I was of him. I confess I am not nearly so sure of him now, and the doubt is not agreeable. If I was wrong, then an innocent man has suffered, and I suppose is suffering now, owing to a terrible mistake. In that case I can

only say I did it ignorantly. I can only hope that some kind of reparation may yet be possible. If my doctor should happen to be correct, I shall not live to see it. That is no reason, I suppose, why I should not leave my version of the story on record, in case the matter ever turns up again. Sometimes I half believe it will, and in that case what I have to say may be of some use. I don't say I have changed my mind. I don't say Jenkins was innocent. All I say is that it now seems just possible that he may have been. All I feel is that the more I think about it the more I am puzzled. Pray understand me once for all. I am not a lawyer, but a banker, and I am not going to tell this story as a lawyer would tell it. I mean to tell it all, but I mean to tell it all in my own way. If the doctor is right, it will be just as well; if he should happen to be wrong, which is no doubt fully as likely, no harm will have been done.

I had been to Paris on business of the bank, and was on my way home. I am not fond of travelling at the best of times; and the end of November is not, as a rule, the best of times for travelling. The rule was not proved by November, 1832. It was no exception in the matter of November weather. I don't like bad English weather, but I like bad French weather even worse. I was glad to get into the Dover packet. I was positively relieved to hear the good, hearty swearing of Christian sailors once more. The passage was cold, but it was not tedious, and by eleven o'clock that night I was enjoying a glass of hot brandy and water before a big fire in the snuggest corner of the "Ship" Inn at Dover. The easterly wind had given me an appetite for the brandy and water, and the brandy and water gave me an appetite for bed. I never slept more

soundly in my life than I did on the night of the 18th of November, 1832.

Next morning I was all right, which is more than the weather was. I had breakfast, of course, and it isn't important to mention what I had for breakfast. I had only just finished, and was looking out of the window at the rather dreary prospect, when another traveller came into the room. I turned half round to look at him. He was busy unrolling a huge comforter from his neck, and equally busy taking a good look at the room. There are some people who must see all there is to be seen. They are usually thin people, I think, and they generally have small eyes. This man was certainly thin, and his eyes were decidedly small. He was a melancholy man, but his eyes were his most singular feature. They were something like a dark lantern, mostly concealed, but startlingly bright when they were uncovered. They were uncovered now, and as they glanced at me for a moment I had a disagreeable feeling that he had been taking an inventory of my clothing so that he might know me again. Just then he caught my eye.

"Servant, sir," he observed, in a soft, rather slow voice, that agreed excellently with his appearance, all but his eyes, but didn't agree with them at all. "For London, I presume. Dull morning for driving."

"It seems so," I replied, not exactly pleased at his assuming to know my movements so well, and turning again to look out of the window.

It was certainly an unpromising morning. The east wind had changed to a northeaster, and the change had not improved matters. The sky was gray and lowering, and the wind sighed dismally as it swept round the corner of the street. The atmosphere looked thick

and heavy, and the smoke from the chimneys refused to rise, and hung about the roofs and eddied round the corners. Few people were to be seen, and these few appeared to wish themselves indoors again.

As I turned from the window, the waiter brought in breakfast for my companion.

"Do you know when the London coach will start?" I asked him.

"Yes, sir. In half an hour, sir," he answered.

"In fifteen minutes, exactly," said the stranger, in the same melancholy voice as before. "So pour out that coffee, if you please, and look sharp about it."

I looked at the speaker once more. His attention was fixed on his breakfast, and his face looked if possible more melancholy than ever, but I felt sure at a glance that he had not spoken hastily, and that if he said quarter of an hour, the coach was not likely to be much later. I went up-stairs to pack my travelling-bag. It didn't take me long to do this, but before I had finished I heard the hoarse, foggy notes of the horn, and the roll of the coach as it came round the corner and drew up at the door. I made haste to get into my great coat, gloves, and comforter, and hurried downstairs to pay my bill, but before I was ready to start I could hear that the driver was getting impatient. I did mean to try an outside seat, but the first keen blast of wind decided me to do otherwise. "Here you are, sir," shouted the guard, holding the door open for me to get in. In a moment I had got in, and the door was slammed to behind me. In another moment I had sunk into a vacant seat, and the coach had started. The man I had left at his breakfast was there before me. Once more he had got into his great coat, he was once more half-buried in his huge comforter; and he had

secured the best seat in the coach. I could have sworn he would. The second best seat was occupied also. I looked at the man who had taken it, and the man immediately apologized. Of course he was a Frenchman, and, of course, while he apologized for taking the best seat, he kept it. I am not fond of Frenchmen, and I don't care for apologies, so I said nothing, but prepared to make the best of it. I sat opposite the Frenchman, with my back to the horses. The other passenger who, thank heaven, was English, sat beyond the Frenchman, farthest from the door. He was nearly buried in his comforter, and he said nothing either. In a few seconds the Frenchman stopped; they generally do if you take no notice of them. Perhaps he thought I didn't understand him; but what does it matter what a Frenchman thinks?

It didn't promise to be a lively ride, and we didn't promise to be a lively party. For a wonder, no promises were broken. The journey was not a lively one, and the company was decidedly dismal. The weather was against us, and the state of the roads was not in our favor. A seat on the top of the coach on a fine day, over a good road and through a good country, is enjoyable enough. An inside seat in a coach, creeping over a bad road, with a northeaster just visiting the back of your neck through two or three cracks; a taciturn Englishman wrapped up to his eyes in a great coat in one corner, and a fool of a Frenchman buried up to his ears in a comforter in the other, is a very different business. There wasn't much to be seen inside. Heaven knows, a Frenchman isn't much. And there was very little more visible outside. Melancholy hedgerows, all the worse for a few red leaves that lingered damp and drooping on the twigs; trees nearly

leafless, but festooned with a cold, gray mist; fences that looked blurred and indistinct in the hazy atmosphere; these formed the view from the window when I had rubbed it clear of mist, and the view wasn't worth the trouble. There was nothing else to be seen. Like my companions I, too, buried myself in my great coat, I, too, settled myself down to make the best of it.

We made very slow progress. If you know the Dover road you will understand the reason: if you don't you must take my word for it. I got out at the first stage, half inclined to try an outside seat in spite of the weather. Two minutes cured me of that idea. The wind had fallen a little, but the weather had grown worse. The sky was the color of lead, and the clouds hung so low you could fancy you might reach them. It didn't rain and it didn't snow, but the air was full of fine particles of something of the color of rain and the coldness of snow, that seemed to float and swim without falling. The guard and coachman both looked so wretched that my excursion cost me a brandy and water apiece for them, and that was about all I got for it. I got back into the coach. Even a Frenchman half asleep was not so bad as the weather outside. Once more I took refuge in my comforter and coat-collar. Once more I tried to make the best of a bad bargain.

Of course we were late for dinner. I suppose we were an hour behind time, but it didn't much matter. The dinner was not worth eating when we got it. The Frenchman drank a good deal of brandy, and made observations on the weather in French. I wasn't compelled to defend the weather, so I said nothing. I envied the other passenger, I admit. He seemed to be able to enjoy his dinner, and he did so. He said very

little to any one, but he did a good deal for himself. For my part, I had no appetite for my dinner, and just about as little for my company. The weather was growing worse, and the only comfort was that the road could hardly grow much worse than it was. Yet it wasn't these things that troubled me. It seems absurd, but it was a fact, that I felt as if something disagreeable was going to happen, although I had not the remotest idea what it was going to be. A presentiment of evil, you will say, perhaps. Stuff and nonsense; indigestion, most likely, with a touch of rheumatism to give it point.

It was going to snow, that was evident. If we had hoped to escape it before, it was plain enough we were going to be disappointed now. It wasn't falling yet, but it was in the air. The raw misty particles had grown more grey and began to look soft and feathery, as they drifted backwards and forwards. The leaden clouds were, if possible, nearer to the ground than ever, almost touching it, in fact. There was very little wind, but what there was had a soft sighing sound that was very melancholy. I was actually glad to be in the coach again. I was positively satisfied to be shut up again with my silent companions. The coach jolted on. The cold damp air crept in through the cracks as before. The view from the window was, like my companions, muffled up to the eyes. There was nothing for it but to make the best of it. I followed their example at last. I drew up my coat-collar and tried to sleep once more.

I suppose I must have succeeded, for when I again became clearly conscious it was with a start. Why I woke just then I don't know. Why I became instantly so very wide awake I cannot tell. We were still going slowly, and we were still going up-hill. I sat up and

rubbed the dim windows with my coat-sleeve. The light had grown grey and grisly inside, and even rubbing the glass didn't make it much better. It had begun to snow, and it had begun to grow dusk. I thought I should like, if possible, to see where we were. I glanced at my companions. Both of them seemed to be asleep. I let down the window nearest me and put out my head. The snow had begun: it was not heavy, but the air was full of it, and a very few yards away the view was nothing but a moving haze of soft floating grey feathers. I drew in my head. I was just going to put up the window again, when I heard the dull sound of a horse's hoofs on the road in front of us. I paused with the strap in my hand; I waited to see what would happen next.

What happened was this—A hoarse-throaty voice shouted the one word,—“Stop!” The coach was pulled up in an instant, or rather the horses ceased to crawl up-hill. “Stand for your lives!” shouted the voice again. This time the tone was sharper and more clear. The order was quite useless; had we had as many lives as a cat, we couldn't have stood more still than we did. In another moment he was at the side of the coach, looking in at the window, which I still mechanically held open. I suppose I ought to have been frightened, but I don't think I was. It felt like a huge joke. Here in 1832—with the Reform Bill passed, too—here we were in the very act of being robbed by a highwayman! The thing was absurd; it was out of date. It might be so, but, after all, it was a fact.

“Sorry to trouble you, gentlemen, I'm sure, but if you happen to have any money about you, I must ask you to hand it over.”

It was the same harsh-throaty voice in which he had

first spoken. It was a voice which did not, I felt sure, belong to the speaker. I looked at him curiously as he spoke; what I saw was a tall young man, with hair that was very black, and worn rather long and curly. He wore a great coat of coarse rough frieze, buttoned up to his throat, a soft hat slouched over his face, and a black silk mask which effectually concealed his features, all but a pair of very bright black eyes that shone fiercely through the eye-holes of the mask, and a very small ear,—delicately shaped and tinted like a shell. He was riding a tall black horse that looked like a hunter, and he sat him like a man accustomed to it. I noticed as much as this while he was speaking, and I fancied he didn't care much for my careful scrutiny. Perhaps he was a little nervous, for he looked at my companions, both of whom were awake by this time, and spoke again rather impatiently.

“Come, gentlemen! the cash, if you please! your horses will catch cold if you keep them standing.”

There was less of the hoarseness in his voice this time, and my ear detected one or two remarkable tones as he pronounced some of the words. I glanced at my companions. Already the Frenchman had produced his purse, which he offered with a trembling hand; my other companion was fumbling for his in his pocket. The robber sat quite still, with his pistol pointed through the window. There was no help for it. I pulled out my purse reluctantly. He took the Frenchman's purse and dropped it into his coat-pocket. Then he held out his hand for mine. The hand was a noticeable one, and I couldn't help remarking it. It was long and thin. The fingers were slender yet muscular, and very white. The nails were filbert-shaped and beautifully kept. No matter what it was doing, it was a gentleman's hand.

As he stretched it out he exposed the wrist. It was marked with a scar which stood out blue, and curved almost to a half circle—a very singular scar.

I handed him the purse; he took it with a polite bow; as he did so, I remembered that a ring which I had taken to Paris for one of my partners, to get repaired, was in it. "Stay!" I said, "there's a ring there that is not mine; let me have it back!" For a moment he seemed to hesitate; for an instant I thought he was about to hand it me back again: then he laughed—a strange, uneasy laugh—and dropped the purse into his pocket.

"Come, my man!" he exclaimed, hastily, looking threateningly at my silent companion, who didn't seem even yet to have found his purse; "there's no time to waste!"

As he spoke, he leaned over till his head was inside the window of the coach. My companion sat up, and as if very reluctantly held out his purse, at which the robber snatched hastily.

It all happened in a moment. As he grasped at the purse it was dropped and his own wrist was firmly grasped instead. At the same moment my companion drew a pistol and presented it at the head of the intruder.

"All right, sir," he exclaimed, in the same soft melancholy voice; "you are my prisoner!"

I was as much surprised as the robber himself; so I only sat and stared like a fool. The robber had more presence of mind than I had, for he made a tremendous effort to release his hand. His position placed him at a great disadvantage, however, and he failed.

"Let go!" he exclaimed, angrily.

"I think not, sir!"

"You won't?"

"No, sir!"

Whether it was intentional or not, I can't say. I saw a struggle, I heard the question and the answer. Short, sharp, and fierce on one side, quiet, firm and hard as iron on the other: there was a sudden movement, a flash—and without a word or a groan the wrist was free, and my companion sank back again into his corner.

For an instant the robber paused, motionless, like a man turned to stone. Still he stared through the open window; still he held the smoking pistol pointed before him. Then, with a sudden movement, he drew back,—he turned away with a wild gesture. As he did so he exclaimed in a hollow voice—his own voice, no doubt, now, although agitated,

"Oh, my God!"

Tossing out his arm he hurled the pistol from him. Striking spurs into his horse's flanks, he disappeared from the window.

I threw open the door and jumped out. Through the dense mist of snowflakes that filled the air, I saw him face the black horse at a high hedge now growing white with snow. In a moment he rose to the leap. In a moment the wild figure showing black against the white background disappeared in the storm.

I turned hastily to the coachman, who sat as if only half conscious on the box.

"Drive on!" I shouted. "Drive on for your life. One of the passengers is shot."

"Good God!" he exclaimed, as he hastily gathered up the reins and grasped the whip. I leaped into the coach, and slammed to the door. With a sudden jerk the horses plunged forward. As they did so, I put out

my hand to steady the wounded man. I drew it back hastily: it was useless,—the man was dead.

There was no doubt about it. The bullet had gone straight through his heart, and there he sat upright in the corner of the coach, with the same melancholy look upon his face as before, but dead, quite dead.

It was a strange, wild drive through the storm,—the dead Englishman, looking like life, in one corner, and the living Frenchman, looking like death, in the other. In twenty minutes we drove into Rochester. In fifty minutes the police had been informed, and half a dozen armed men on horseback were ready to start in pursuit of the murderer.

“That’s all the description you can give of him, sir?” asked the sergeant, as he stood on the inn steps, his coat and hat growing white in the falling snow.

“That’s all, sergeant.”

“And he turned off the road to the right?”

“Yes, to the right, over the hedge.”

“That will do, men. There’ll be a good reward for the man who takes him.”

“I’ll give a hundred pounds myself,” I exclaimed.

“Very liberal of you, sir,” said the sergeant. “You hear that, men? Now be off!”

The men turned hastily and galloped down the street. In a moment they were only dim figures in the mist; in two they had disappeared. I glanced round me. The air was full of snow; the street and the house-tops were white already. If I had been a Frenchman, I suppose I should have shrugged my shoulders. The track of the robber would be a hard track to follow that night. The hundred pounds were not likely to be claimed very soon.

CHAPTER II.

THE matter created a great stir in the city. Highway robbery was a crime rather out of date, for one thing, and this man who was shot turned out to be one of the most famous Bow Street runners of his day, for another. There was an inquest on the body, of course, and the jury found that he had come by his death by means of a bullet fired from a pistol by some person unknown. This was all the jury had to do, and the jury did it. It was no news to anybody, and it didn't do anybody much good. Proclamations were issued; placards were posted everywhere; rewards were offered for the apprehension of the murderer. Nothing came of it. The murderer was not apprehended. The Bow Street runner was dead and buried, my money and my partner's ring were gone, and so was the man who took them. It seemed just about as likely that one would be found as the other. For months that seemed likely to be an end of the whole business.

I had been robbed of just one hundred and twenty-five pounds, in notes of our own bank. I am a man of business, so I needn't say I had taken down the numbers of the notes. Having the numbers and having lost the notes, I needn't mention, I should hope, that I posted them up in the office.

It was on the 25th of March that old Peters came to my room just before closing hour. Peters had been in the house for fifty years, and was almost like one of

ourselves. The old man looked mysterious. Mystery is not English, so I have an objection to mystery.

"What's the matter with you, Peters?" I asked him, sharply.

He looked round the room cautiously, then he whispered,—

"The notes, sir!"

"The notes! What notes do you mean?" I said, impatiently.

"Two twenties, sir, numbers 2683 and 2684, and one ten, number 9872."

The missing notes, at least three of them! I looked at Peters: his face was beaming with excitement. I dare say mine was beaming, too. I forgave him his un-English assumption of mystery on the spot. It might not be English, but it certainly was natural; I felt it myself, and I forgave Peters. Here was a clue at last. In November the snow had baffled justice and befriended robbery and murder, in March each of these numbers befriended the cause of justice and threatened the safety of the robber and murderer. I had begun to lose interest in the subject before; the interest returned stronger than ever on the spot.

I sent Peters for the notes, and we examined them carefully. They were new notes when I handed them to the robber, and it was evident they had not passed through many hands since then. There was a stain on one of the twenties, and a spot like grease on the corner of the ten. After examination, that was all we could make out. That was all the notes had to say for themselves. They had just been sent in as exchanges for Glynn's: that was all Peters could tell me about them. At first I thought of taking them to Bow Street, that the police might make inquiries. On second thoughts I

decided otherwise. In four months the police had done nothing to trace the murderer; very likely they would do just as little now. Bow Street had done nothing so far, so I determined to let Bow Street go on doing nothing a little longer.

Next day I made inquiries at Glynn's. Evidently this was the first step to take, and the first step proved to be easy enough. The notes came to Glynn's from Norwich, and had been sent by a local bank to them as their London agents.

My last coaching experience had not been pleasant, and I had vowed I would never try another. This was in November, and here was I, in March, eager to set out on another. I am English, and I pride myself on my consistency, which is a peculiarly English virtue; but the circumstances of this case were peculiar enough to excuse it. So I waived my consistency and started for Norwich.

If not comfortable, the journey was safe enough, and I reached Norwich on the 28th of March. It was not at all difficult to find the banker who sent the notes to London. It was not in the least troublesome to learn all he knew about them, which was little enough. The notes came in from a branch at Bury, and if I liked he would ascertain from the branch where they came from. I was obliged for the offer, but declined it. Having begun the search, I was anxious to finish it. I would follow the track of the notes myself; I would see for myself what was to be seen at Bury. Norwich, although clearly the second step, was a step that did not take one far.

A letter from the Norwich banker secured me the good offices of the branch at Bury. Now, at last, I felt as if I was on the track of the notes. I almost

felt as if I was on the track of the robber. The notes had been paid into the bank by a customer. It was not the practice to name their customers, but in this case they would depart from their custom. The name of the customer was Thompson, and Thompson was a substantial man, and a grazier. A grazier! I thought of the grease spot on the note, and I took an interest in Thompson at once. Next day was market day. If I waited I should be nearly sure to see Thompson for myself. I waited. Thompson was evidently the third step. Thompson was worth waiting for.

From the first I somehow didn't suspect Thompson of being the robber; when I saw him I was sure he was not. He was every inch a grazier, and there were many more inches of him measured round than there were of the robber. Fortunately, he had a good memory; he remembered the notes at once, and knew exactly where he got them. He had sold ten fat bullocks to Giles the butcher, and Giles had given him the notes in part payment. I showed the note with the greasy mark on the corner, and he said the mark was made by Giles's thumb. Another step was gained, and that step landed me at the door of Giles's shop. I knew before I saw him that he was not the robber, whatever the robber was, he certainly was not a butcher. Giles had nothing to conceal, and Giles's memory was perfectly clear. He recollected the notes at once, and he knew where he got them. About two months before he had them from Malkin at the Norfolk Arms, in payment of a bill. Malkin was the landlord, and could be seen at any time within ten minutes. Giles was obliging and offered himself to take me to Malkin. A glance at the landlord told me that I had still further to go. Malkin was exceedingly like a landlord and not

in the least like a gentleman; the man I was looking for was exceedingly like a gentleman and not a bit like a landlord.

Malkin, however, was a man I couldn't do without. When I reached the innkeeper I felt I was very close to the robber. He was essentially English, and he was essentially slow. Yes, he could remember having notes and paying them to Giles. The notes I showed him might have been the notes, and they might not; very likely they were the notes, for that matter. But he wouldn't swear to them, and he didn't know as it was any of his business to swear to them. I thought he was afraid that the notes had turned out to be bad, and I hastened to relieve his mind. The effect was less than I had expected. He was glad to hear the notes were good, and if so be they were the same notes he had paid to neighbor Giles, so much the better.

I felt myself at a stand-still with Malkin. There is nothing more respectable than English caution; there is nothing less manageable than English stupidity. I was not sure how much of Malkin was caution and how much was stupidity; but I felt as if my schemes were in danger of shipwreck, owing to the combination of the two qualities.

Having gone so far, however, I was bent upon going further; sooner than fail I was ready to take Malkin into my confidence. I determined to put up at the Norfolk Arms; I made up my mind to know all about the notes that was known to the landlord.

I had to tell him the whole story to the end, and it turned out to be the right thing to do. Like most slow men, Malkin valued himself on saying less than his neighbors. Solomon has remarked how much other people are apt to think of the man who holds his

tongue; he might have gone further, and remarked how much they usually think of their own wisdom. Malkin at any rate was flattered by my confidence. Until I told him the story his memory was painfully vague; as soon as he had heard it his memory was perfect.

"You're dead sure as them's the notes," he asked, taking his pipe from his lips, leaning confidentially across the corner of the table that separated us, and speaking low. I looked steadily at him and nodded.

"Well, then, 'twarn't your man!" and he calmly replaced his pipe once more, and looked steadily at the fire.

Not my man! Here was a disappointment. I had made sure, from the very difficulty of taking this step, that it would prove important. I had somehow felt certain that if I could only stir up Malkin's memory to activity the result would be worth the trouble.

"Not my man? Are you quite sure?" I asked.

"Tall, you said, and dark, sir, didn't you?" And again he resumed his pipe, and solemnly stared me in the face.

"Yes, tall and dark, and a gentleman; white hands, black hair, and very black eyes."

He stared at me while I spoke. He ticked off the various points of my description in the air with his pipe; then he paused meditatively: gradually a look of intelligence dawned in his light-blue eyes and spread over his face. Then he drew a long breath and slowly expelled the air again from his lungs in a low whistle.

"Well," I said, after another pause, "it wasn't he?"

"No. It warn't him: it was t'other one."

"Who did you say?" I exclaimed, starting from my chair, and looking eagerly into his stolid face, which had settled into a pleased look of self-appreciation.

"T'other one," he repeated. "T'other one."

"He was here, then?"

"Well, yes, he was here, off and on like, off and on."

It was not an easy matter to extract information from Malkin, even when he was most willing to give it. It took a long time to do it now, and it was not done all at once. In the end, however, I believe I did learn all he had to tell: when it was put together it came to this:

Three gentlemen had stayed at the inn in November and December of the year before. They were rather sporting men, and they kept horses. One of them must have been a soldier, for the others called him major. It was from the major that the landlord had received the notes. They played cards a great deal, and they drank a great deal of wine, but they were pleasant, free-spoken gentlemen enough. A fourth one used to come there sometimes. He was younger than the others; a great deal younger than the major. When he was there they played more cards and drank more wine than usual. He was a tall young man, with black curly hair, and very black flashing eyes, and very much the gentleman. The landlord never got any money from him. He came to see the major, and his bill was always charged to the major. The major's name was Fowler, at least that was the name on his trunk in plain letters. The name of the young man was Jenkins, and the place where he lived was Holby Lodge, near Bristol. Malkin knew this, because he had told him so in case any letters should come for him, that he might forward them. No letters had come, and nothing had been forwarded. He would certainly know the young man again if he saw him, because he was not a common looking person.

Boiled down, this was all that Malkin knew of the matter. He was not sure of dates. He knew that the major had left before Christmas, but he thought Mr. Jenkins had left some weeks before. He got the notes from the major when he left, and it was a mercy the notes turned out good. Malkin was deeply interested in the story now, but nothing could really equal the interest he evidently felt in the undisputed genuineness of the notes.

So far, then, as the notes went, this was the whole. So far as the money was concerned, the track ended here. There was nothing more to be done in Norfolk; and in the end of March Norfolk isn't worth staying in for its own sake. I broke my resolution again: I made another coach journey to town. Should I go to Bristol and look after Mr. Jenkins? This was the question that occupied my mind during the journey. I had already taken a great deal of trouble, and spent a good deal of time: was it worth while to take a great deal more trouble, and spend nobody could guess how much more time? If I went to Bristol, for what was I to go? If I met Mr. Jenkins of Holby Lodge, what was I to say? It was no easy matter to answer such questions satisfactorily to myself, but it was more difficult still to decide upon giving the matter up. Every step I had taken had made me more anxious to take another. Each discovery I had made had made others appear at once more easy and more desirable. I could not abandon the inquiry now. I could not rest content with a mystery where, perhaps, it might be a mystery easily solved. I decided to go to Bristol. I determined, if possible, to see Holby Lodge for myself. I made up my mind that I would have a look at Mr. Jenkins with my own eyes.

The next question was, should I go alone? So far I had managed matters for myself, and so far I had managed them successfully. I had traced the notes through various hands, and I had decided in my own mind the hands that had originally taken them. Why not do the rest myself? Why not go on as I had begun? There was much to be said on the other side, and in the end the other side persuaded me. I decided to take the police into my confidence, to consult the experience of Bow Street in unravelling the mystery.

The commissioner of police was civil. I didn't think he was best pleased that I had done so much without him. I have more than a suspicion that he thought he would have done it a good deal better without my assistance. Perhaps he was right: at any rate it was natural he should be of that opinion. He agreed with me that Holby Lodge was the place at which to make the next inquiries, and that Mr. Jenkins was the next person to see. An experienced officer was directed to accompany me to Bristol, while the commissioner himself undertook to find Major Fowler, and discover all that he knew about the notes.

Mr. Roberts might have been an experienced officer; he certainly was not an interesting companion. We travelled from London to Bristol together by coach (another instance of inconsistency, once more excused by circumstances), and I cannot say I remember his making a single remark on the journey. I didn't mind that at all, if he were only efficient; I did object to it if he were only sulky. In the end I abandoned the idea of Mr. Roberts's efficiency, and finally adopted the opinion that he was sulky.

We were six days in Bristol without once hearing of Holby Lodge, and we might have been there still with

the same result for anything Roberts did to prevent it. His one idea was to employ the police, and the only result was that the police had never heard of such a place, and therefore no such place existed. So far as I could see, Mr. Roberts took very little trouble beyond asking the police, and the police excelled Mr. Roberts by taking no trouble at all. The post-office people had never heard of the place. I knew this, for I had inquired myself, and neither letters nor anything else ever were addressed to anybody named Jenkins at any place called Holby Lodge. Roberts was satisfied there was no such place, and wanted to go back. I was not satisfied, and had made up my mind to stay till I found it. I told Roberts he had better go back, and perhaps for that very reason he only looked sulky and stayed.

I found Holby Lodge after all myself, and I found it by accident. I had made up my mind to find the place, and I set to work in earnest to do it. I hired a gig and a driver, and visited every place I could hear of within half a dozen miles of Bristol, and yet I didn't hear of such a place. Then I went further. It was the fifth day and I was growing tired of it. If it hadn't been for Roberts, I believe I should have given it up before. Every time I saw his sulky face, it declared that I would never find Holby House. Every time I saw him I need hardly say I was more determined to find it than before. On the fifth day, as we were coming home, we stopped at a village inn for a glass of ale. The landlord brought it out himself, and by way of complimenting him on the brew, I held up the glass to look through it. As I did so my eye caught sight of a distant church tower among the trees. I paused to look again.

"What church is that over there, landlord?" I asked.

"Over theer?" he replied, slowly turning round to follow where my finger pointed. "Why, thaaf be Holby Choorch. Zure enough, zur. Doan't ee knaw Holby Choorch?"

And the inn-keeper stared thoughtfully at me, as if I had been an exceptional specimen of lamentable ignorance.

"I suppose there's a village?" I remarked, staring at the distant tower as one does at anything one has looked for till he has given up expecting to see it.

"Village? Yes, theer's a village, but not to zay mooch of one, after all."

"Isn't there a hall, or a squire's house, or something of the sort there?" I asked, much excited.

"Cann't zay as theer bee. Plaace ain't no good since old house wor shoot oop, and thaaf's—whoy, thaaf must be noy on twenty years ago."

"There was an old house at Holby, then?" I asked.

"To be zure theer war—years ago theer war—years ago."

After some trouble I discovered the road to Holby village. After a good deal more trouble I managed to get there over the worst road in the county. The surprise of the decaying village at the unaccustomed sight of a gig was almost as great as that of the landlord of the poor little village ale-house, at my inquiry who lived up at the great house.

"Noo one lived theer naow," was the reply, given with a melancholy shake of the head, indicating apparently how serious the fact was to the village in general and to the ale-house in particular.

"Who used to live there, then?" I persisted.

"Whoy, auld Squoire Jenkins, to be zure."

"And where is he now?"

"Doan't know! Hur be dead and goan these twenty years."

"And the house, who owns it now?"

"Doan't know. They do zay hur be in Chaancery."

It looked like it. I drove past the gates, that had once been stately, and now hung rusting on their hinges. I could see what had once been a drive, now a thicket of weeds, leading up to the front of a fine old house, falling like the gates to decay. No Mr. Jenkins lived there now; no clue could be followed through the tangled wilderness of Holby Lodge.

I had followed my clue to the end. The track of the robber had ended in a snow-drift; the track left by the notes had ended in the wilderness of a chancery suit.

I gave it up. It was no use disguising the fact of my disappointment, so I went back to Bristol and told Roberts. He said it was a pity, but I don't believe he thought so. As an official, he objected to unofficial interference. As a Bow Street runner, he objected to unprofessional detectives. He satisfied himself by seeing Holby Lodge, and then we both went back to town once more. Our journey had been a failure; our clue, that seemed so good, had led us to nothing. I went back to my work at the bank. Mentally I called myself a fool for ever leaving it.

A few days later the commissioner called on me. He came to inspect the notes, and tell me what he had learned about the major. He saw the notes, of course, but he had not succeeded in seeing the major. He had ascertained that no such major existed in the British army, and he more than hinted that I had been in some way the victim of a hoax.

It was now the 16th of April, and I had wasted three

weeks of valuable time on a wild-goose chase. I was heartily sick of the whole affair, and I told the commissioner as much. If the police could do any more, they were very welcome to do it. If the ends of justice demanded further exertions, the police were welcome to make them. I washed my hands then and there of the whole business. I went back then and there to my own work once more. I am far from certain now that I wasn't right.

CHAPTER III.

THE police didn't do any more. If the ends of justice demanded sacrifices from the police, the ends of justice must have been disappointed. Months passed away and no more was done. There is an old saying that "Murder will out," and the police religiously believe in it. If murder will out, it would be a pity to interfere with the process. If Providence takes these matters in hand, the police have no mind to set up as rivals to Providence. Perhaps they are right. So far as I have observed, the attempt would meet with very little success.

I washed my hands of the whole business in April, and thought I had done with it. I was mistaken. I didn't throw myself in the way of it again; it threw itself in mine. To tell the truth, I felt ashamed of my detective experience, and did my best to forget it. I was not so successful as I could have wished in this, but I made some progress.

During all the summer months I stuck closely to work at the bank, and it was only now and then that the one terrible memory of my uneventful life came between me and my work. Try as hard as I might, I couldn't always banish the melancholy face of the dead Bow Street runner. Give myself as earnestly to my work as I chose, still the black eyes of the robber and the visionary face which my fancy had fitted to the eyes would come at times between me and the figures.

Still I was getting rid of it. The summer months

had succeeded to spring, and the months of autumn had in their turn supplanted the summer. Already the trees in the Park—the only trees a man need wish to see—had grown from green to gold, and the gold was fast fading into brown. It was late in October, and a year would very soon have passed since my coach journey from Dover. I believe this very thought passed through my mind as I strolled into the Park that Saturday afternoon for my usual walk. I had just turned in at the gates, and I suppose it was the sight of the trees growing brown, and the autumn feeling in the wind that brought it to my mind. After all, it did seem a shame that the mystery should remain forever a mystery. One always stands still to be indignant,—at least I always do. I stood still now. My thoughts were not complimentary to the police force. After all, the police were none of my business. I shook my head to get rid of the feeling, and resolutely walked on.

The trees had something to do with the feeling. I looked away from the trees. The wind, just burdened with the soft, regretful sigh of autumn, was partly responsible. I looked about for something to divert my attention from the wind.

Two gentlemen were walking in front of me. Like myself, they seemed to have come for a stroll; like myself, they appeared to have no special business. As I had determined not to look at the trees or listen to the wind, I amused myself idly by looking at them. They were both young. I like young men, as a rule. At first sight I was disposed to like these two; of course, I could only see their backs, but their backs were the backs of gentlemen. Don't tell me that backs have no expression. I haven't walked London streets for five

and forty years without knowing better than that. These young men's backs were the backs of gentlemen. One of them had a dog. He was a handsome retriever, black as a sloe, and he followed close at his master's heels. There is a good deal in the way a dog follows his master. Dogs are nearly always faithful, but they are not always confidential. It's a good sign of a man when his dog is confidential. This dog kept close to his master; he was accustomed to nothing but kindness.

After a time they stopped; I stopped, too, as I had no wish to pass them. Once more I let my eyes wander to the golden-brown trees. Once more I listened for a few seconds to the gentle sighing of the mellow autumn wind. They had been talking, and now they were parting. I didn't look at them exactly, but I could see as much as that. They stood face to face and shook hands. I like to see men shake hands. I've often seen Frenchmen embracing each other, bah!—well, perhaps for a Frenchman it doesn't matter much, but give me an English shake of the hand. It is straightforward and manly. You look a man in the face while you do it, and you don't grin over his left shoulder. You can read in a man's eyes whether he means it or not. These two shook hands heartily enough. I was pretty close to them and I heard their last words.

"You won't go, then?"

"Not this time. The burnt child, you know."

"Bother the burnt child, Charlie. That's all nonsense."

"Oh, come now; it's all right. Money, too, they say."

"Likely enough. Another objection, I should say."

What was it in the voice that attracted me? What

was it that made my heart beat and my blood move quickly at the sound? What was it that drew me, almost against my will, a few feet nearer to the speakers? I couldn't tell at the moment, but I was conscious of the excitement. I knew that the blood was flushing my cheek. I knew that I was eager to hear that voice again. I knew as much as this, yet this was all I knew.

The young man who was addressed laughed gaily.

"Another of your absurdities, Charlie, as usual. Always fanciful and Quixotic. So you really object to the cash?"

"Yes, that's it, exactly. I really object to the cash."

I turned round quickly at that word. I was rude enough to stare openly at the speaker who had used it. He was half turned from me as he laughingly said good-bye to his friend. He didn't notice me at all as I stood and stared at him. Now I knew what had attracted my attention when he spoke at first. That word "cash," pronounced in that clear, strong, half-scornful voice—I had heard it before. In an instant, as if revealed by a flash of lightning, it rose before me—the coach, the passengers, the open window, the still but threatening figure holding the pistol in his hand. The dull afternoon light was round him again; the dismal drifting of the snow-flakes was behind him. In an instant I saw it all once more, and the very tone of his voice rang again in my ear as he uttered the words, "Gentlemen, the cash, if you please!" Was it, could it be the same?

What is there in a tone, after all? But, then, what is there in any human peculiarity? Men have similar tones of voice. They have also similar eyes, noses, figures. There is nothing in the world, I suppose,

without its duplicate ; but which of us thinks of that when startled by a resemblance ? The tone of that voice startled me. Unconsciously it convinced me, made me sure that I had the robber before me. I stared at him. I seemed unable to take my eyes off his tall, slight, yet powerful and active figure. After a moment's pause, he sauntered slowly on. After a similar pause, I sauntered slowly after him. The figure had fascinated me. I forgot all about my disappointing experience of detective work. I forgot all about my resolution to think no more of the matter. For the moment I was an enthusiastic detective. I could think of absolutely nothing else.

The young man sauntered towards a seat, and I sauntered after him. He appeared wholly unconscious of my presence. I was utterly unconscious of anything but his. As he walked on, I was almost mechanically engaged in examining his person. I was taking note of his tall figure, with its easy if rather indolent gait, and its striking appearance of combined lightness and strength. The same qualities had struck me in the highwayman, and as I looked they came back to my memory with the force of conviction. Suddenly I thought of the hair. That of the robber was black and curly, it was also rather long. The figure before me had black hair also, yes, and it too was curly, but it was not long. That was nothing ; a peculiarity which the fancy of a minute could remove ; a mark to be obliterated by the scissors of the first barber he might visit. No ; this was the same jet-black, glossy hair, showing below the fashionable hat. There were the remains of the same curls, now cut short, around the firm strong neck, and round the back of the well-shaped and haughtily-carried head.

Now he turned slightly to one side. I absolutely started; I almost uttered my surprise aloud. It was the very ear,—small, delicate, pink in color, and curled like a shell: it showed like a lady's ear. It was all the more remarkable and unmistakable because the short hair exposed it fully to view. The discovery hardly surprised, but for the moment it seemed to paralyze me. I had expected to find him the same, yet somehow this small confirmation came upon me like a shock. I stood still to recover myself. I paused to think what I should do next.

Evidently he had not noticed me yet. What would he do when he saw me? How would he act when we were once more face to face? That he would fail to recognize me was, of course, out of the question. If I could recall him by such peculiarities as I could gather, who had never seen his face, it was impossible to doubt that one glance of mine, seen under circumstances so terrible, would bring the whole scene before him. He could not attack me here, I knew: I glanced round and observed a policeman at a little distance, moving slowly along with the solemn importance of his kind. No, he could scarcely attack me here. Would he try to escape? He might do that; why not? Once more I glanced at the policeman. This time I saw that he was coming towards us.

Meanwhile the young man had reached a seat, and carelessly thrown himself upon it. His dog crouched before him, and eyed him solemnly with the great soft eyes of dog affection.

I had not yet made up my mind what to do; but there could be no harm in going nearer. I strolled slowly towards the tree at the foot of which he had taken his seat. Still he did not look up. Still he gave

no sign that he saw me coming. I came nearer. My heart beat quickly as I thought of the shock I was about to give him, and wondered how he would take it. I longed and yet dreaded to come face to face again with this man.

His head was bent down as he leaned it on his hand. His eyes were fixed, gloomily as I thought, upon the ground. What was he thinking of? Had he really no presentiment that detection was close at hand? Suddenly the dog seemed to comprehend that his master was disturbed. He looked up at him with great dreamy eyes full of sympathy. He wagged his tail slowly; he sat up. Still his master took no notice. He wriggled himself, sitting upon his tail, a little nearer. Then solemnly he lifted a paw and presented it to be shaken. No notice was taken of the offer. He gave a plaintive and impatient whine, and offered it again. This time his master noticed,—he looked into the bright, faithful, anxious eyes, and he was touched. He dropped the cane he still held, and hastily reached out his right hand to take the offered paw.

“Poor fellow, Carlo!” he said. “Good dog! what is it?”

As he stretched out his hand the last link was supplied. Till that moment I hadn't thought of it; it had utterly escaped my memory. His hasty movement had drawn back the sleeve of his coat. There, on the wrist, was the strange blue scar; there, branded on his white flesh was the certain evidence of his identity. I had not really doubted before; I didn't doubt in the least now. There, sitting at his ease before me, caressing his dog with his long, white, yet muscular fingers, looking into his eyes with his own flashing black eyes, was the very man I had last seen as he disappeared

with that wild despairing gesture into the bewildering mist of the November snow-storm.

I don't often act on impulse, but I acted on impulse then. I didn't think, I didn't stop to think. I stepped forward and spoke.

"Pardon me, sir," I said, then paused that he might see me. He looked up at me from the dog. Yes, they were the same eyes I had seen once before, only they were quiet now, almost melancholy. They looked at me with a quiet surprise. Could it be possible? Did this man really fail to remember? The look embarrassed me, I confess. I had no doubt when I spoke, I had not a doubt now as to the identity of this man. Yet, for the moment, he had the advantage of me. He said nothing; his manner disclosed nothing; he was simply attentive. He was merely courteously disposed to listen. I confess I was taken aback. I had been prepared for flight; I had almost been prepared for violence; what I was not prepared for was condescending attention, courteous indifference. Englishmen, as a rule, resent indifference when it is shown to themselves. Need I remark that I resented this man's indifference? Probably not. Why, a Frenchman might have resented it, and I should hardly have found fault with him for doing so. I certainly did so; I felt my blood grow hot; I felt it rush upwards to my face. I felt myself growing red, and I didn't feel that it improved my temper. I took a step forward; I hesitated no longer.

"Mr. Jenkins, I believe!" I said, in a tone as marked as I could throw into the words. I could see him give a slight start at the name. A slight flush began to show itself in his cheeks. The expression of his eyes changed to one of watchfulness. He rose slowly from the seat.

"Jenkins!" he said. "Well, sir, and if so, in what way can I serve you?"

"Of Holby Lodge near Bristol?" I added, looking him straight in the face.

I could see a troubled look in his eyes. The flush gradually faded from his cheeks, which it left pale. I was sure of my man now. His effrontery only made me angry.

"At your service, sir," he replied, quietly. "And what then?"

His tone was perfectly self-possessed; it was so quiet that it seemed almost contemptuous. If anything is more exasperating than indifference, it is contempt. You will not feel surprised to hear that I was exasperated.

"Then"—I spoke slowly on purpose, and I looked him straight in the face as I did so—"then, Mr. Jenkins, perhaps you will kindly return me the diamond ring you robbed me of on the 19th of last November!"

He started back. For a moment his eyes literally blazed on me, his fingers closed convulsively on his cane as if he would have struck me. It was but for an instant, then a strange look succeeded, a look of horror and of fear, a look that made me shudder in spite of the very natural indignation which I felt.

For several seconds we stood thus face to face. What passed in his mind I cannot even guess. What passed in my own was a mixed feeling in which, in spite of all, pity had some share. Then he spoke. His voice was low and clear. It was not the voice I should have expected. Looking back at it now, it was not the voice I should have looked for in a guilty man.

"There is some strange mistake here, sir," he said.

"If you have lost anything you are under some extraordinary delusion as to the robber."

I was angry again. I think I may say I was naturally angry again. This calm tone was a little too much.

"I am under no delusion, sir. On the 19th of last November, I was robbed of one hundred and twenty-five pounds and a diamond ring, by a highwayman who stopped the Dover coach. I lost my ring, sir, and I lost my money. Another, less fortunate than I, lost his life!"

As I spoke he grew very pale. The strange look in his eyes grew stranger still. It was as if he saw something frightful coming near, as if he watched some horrible phantom as it approached him. I could see that he was greatly agitated: but I could also see that he didn't lose command of himself for one moment. It was in the same clear, steady tone that he spoke again.

"You were robbed, you say; but, excuse me, why do you connect me with the robbery?"

His effrontery amazed, but it also exasperated me. I was indignant. I raised my voice unconsciously.

"Because, sir, the robber was Mr. Jenkins of Holby Lodge, because he had my money, which he spent, and my ring which he refused to return. Because Mr. Jenkins committed a foul murder on the 19th of last November. And because I recognize you as Mr. Jenkins, and charge you with the robbery and the murder!"

He heard me to the last word. He looked me straight in the face to the end. Though his own face grew more and more ghastly as I went on, he never looked away, he never flinched. Then he exclaimed,—

"Oh, my God!"

The tone of his voice was quiet still, but it was more full of agony than any tone I ever heard before or since. At the moment I felt like a murderer myself. I would gladly have recalled the fatal words. It was already too late.

"Sir!" It was the sharp formal voice of the policeman which spoke. "You charge this person with robbery and murder, I understand?"

He glanced hesitatingly from one to the other of us, as if in doubt which was the true man and which the robber. His question brought me to myself. His look restored my self-possession.

"I do," I said, shortly, "of highway robbery on the 19th of last November, and of murder at the time of the robbery."

"Nineteenth November," he repeated, slowly. "Why, that was Trotter's business." For a moment the official's eyes glanced doubtfully at me, and hesitatingly on my companion.

"Well, it's a queer start this; but there's no help for it. You'll have to come along with me, sir." He spoke as if half reluctant, yet compelled to give some title of respect to the man who stood accused of two such crimes, and now faced us both with such a calm expression.

"I am quite ready to go with you if you like," he said, "but where to?"

In those few seconds the excitement had died out of his eyes. He was the most self-possessed of us three.

"To Bow Street first. You needn't say anything, you know, but if you do, it may be used against you by and by," said the policeman, mechanically, looking very hard at the accused, as if he would give a good deal to hear him disregard the warning.

"Thank you. I have no wish to say anything at present. The mistake which this gentleman has made cannot be rectified here. Shall we be going?"

In spite of ourselves the man influenced us even now: he appeared to take us in charge rather than we him.

The policeman looked at him more hesitatingly still,—

"You will go quietly, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly, why not?" His tone was easy and natural. There was almost a smile on his dark, handsome face. I had never seen a man like this before. I had never been so thoroughly puzzled in my life.

We did as he suggested, the policeman and I. One on each side of him, we walked slowly out of the Park; one on each side of him, we got into a cab, and accompanied him to Bow Street.

CHAPTER IV.

HE gave the name of John Jenkins at Bow Street, and from first to last he gave no other name. Do I believe that John Jenkins was his name? you may ask. I can only answer, I do not. This young man was no common man; was no ordinary criminal. He was, if possible, cooler when we reached Bow Street. He was coolest of all when the preliminary examination took place. If I hadn't seen the man's ears for myself, I wouldn't have dreamt of his being the robber. If I hadn't seen that scar on his wrist, I daren't have sworn to him.

Even as it was, I felt uneasy. If this man—he called himself Jenkins, so I suppose I may call him Jenkins, too, without offence—if Jenkins had known the uneasy feeling in my mind, he couldn't have managed better. It was on this one thing that he harped all the time. It was on this one possibility of the likeness of two men that he depended. If he hadn't answered to the name of Jenkins when I spoke, if he hadn't started when I named Holby Lodge, I might have been doubtful. It was everything taken together that made me certain. It was the man himself joined with the name of the place that convinced me. Surely, after all, I could not have been wrong!

At any rate it wasn't I alone who did it—that is one comfort. The police had done little enough before, but they were all activity now. Once tell him what to do and where to go, and your London policeman, at

all events, will do anything, and go anywhere. It is when you ask him for brains that you are disappointed. In this case the business was straightforward; therefore, it was done at once. The Frenchman was tracked and produced in a very short time. The banker, the grazier, the butcher, and the inn-keeper, every one of them was discovered and produced. The coachman and the guard were, of course, in attendance at the trial, and gave their evidence. You may think it strange that when all these concurred in the conviction of Jenkins, I should feel responsible. Your wonder only shows two things: you don't know me, first, and you don't know the facts, second. After all, it was my doing. Don't tell me there was the Frenchman! Of course there was the Frenchman, but his evidence, I should hope, would not go far with an English jury. Then there were the coachman and the guard, and all they knew about it might just as well have hanged the judge as the prisoner. The man was safe enough but for my evidence. He might be strolling in the Park now but for the goodness of my memory. Am I sorry? Not a bit of it. If Jenkins was the man (though he was no more Jenkins than I was), he deserved all and more than all he got. If he was not the man,—well, if he wasn't, it's no use having eyes and ears in this world. Still, I wish it had been some one else who had had the eyes and ears. I should feel more comfortable now if it hadn't been me.

Jenkins was tried at the Old Bailey just three weeks after I recognized him. Curiously enough, it was just a year to the very day from the time of the robbery that the trial took place. Jenkins had no lawyer; he said he preferred defending himself, and he did it. If he hadn't been a highwayman he would have made a

capital lawyer. I never was at a criminal trial before, and I hope I never shall be again. Of course, English justice is the very best kind of justice going, but I didn't think so very much of English justice, after all. I don't think Jenkins had altogether fair play. It wasn't the judge that was to blame, and it wasn't the jury. So far as I could see, the judge did nothing but take notes, and the jury did nothing at all. It was the witnesses that were hardly fair to Jenkins. I don't believe in that Frenchman, to begin with. He actually swore to remembering the highwayman's eyes, when I can remember very well that his own eyes were all but starting from his head with fright the whole time. He recognized the scar on his wrist. If the scar had been as big as his head, I don't believe he'd have seen it that afternoon. Perhaps, after all, it didn't matter much. He was only a Frenchman at best, and the jury knew it.

Then the coachman and the guard! It's true they didn't profess to be very sure, but all they did say was dead against Jenkins. And what do you suppose they knew about it? Nothing whatever; upon my soul, nothing whatever! But, after all, it was old Malkin who settled it. Malkin swore to Jenkins directly he saw him. He didn't know anything about the robbery, and he didn't say Jenkins knew anything about the money; but he swore to Jenkins himself, and he swore to the notes. It was this that convicted him, after all. It was Malkin that put the rope round Jenkins's neck.

I was in court all the time and heard it all. When I heard Malkin swear to him I hadn't the least doubt; and yet when I looked at the man who called himself Jenkins I was puzzled. What was it that puzzled me, I wonder? What was it that to the last made me

watch the face of the man as he stood in the dock? It might have been his coolness that did it. From first to last the man was cool.

When he was first brought in he glanced round the court, and I thought he was nervous; when he had finished looking round there wasn't a trace of anxiety on his face. He was cool when he cross-examined the witnesses. He was cool when he addressed the jury,—he was even cool when they brought in the verdict of guilty,—much more cool, it struck me, than the jury themselves. And his cool, steady look never changed as the judge pronounced sentence. Looking back on it now, his coolness seemed supernatural. Thinking of his face, it looks to me like a human face turned to stone.

The papers were full of the trial the next day, and so far as I remember, only two of them doubted the justice of the verdict. Yet somehow the sentence was commuted to transportation for life. At the time I thought this wrong. I was clear that the man was both robber and murderer, and somehow the reprieve seemed to me to imply a doubt of my evidence. Well, well, we are all apt to be a little conceited; we all put a high value on our own opinions. Why he was reprieved, I don't know; I only know that he was. I have heard nothing about Jenkins since then. Whether that doctor of mine is right or wrong, it is hardly likely I shall ever hear of Jenkins again.

I needn't tell you that that isn't all the story. If it had been all, I shouldn't have written it down; I should have risked the doctor being right. I should have taken my chance of the story dying along with me. It was not all.

When the trial was over, there was an end of it. If

the sentence had been carried out there would have been an end of Jenkins; as he was transported, one might have expected it to be pretty nearly the same thing. I had sent him a message asking what had become of the ring, and had got his answer, that my question was an insult to a gentleman. To the last, you see, he was cool; he would admit nothing. The ring was a diamond ring of French make, but of no very extraordinary value. I made up my mind, and my partner had to make up his, that the ring was finally lost. I made up my mind to wash my hands of Jenkins. As a man of business I knew the importance of making up one's mind. I dismissed the ring from my thoughts; I washed my hands finally of Jenkins.

Was I unreasonable in supposing this to be an end of the business? I think not; and yet I was mistaken.

It was on the fifteenth of this month, about two in the afternoon, that Peters tapped hastily at my door. Of course I said 'Come in!' but the old man didn't. Instead of that he put his head in at the door, and looked at me for an instant without speaking. Something in his face startled me, and I said, "Well, Peters, what is it?"

"Would you mind coming here, sir?" he said, "and looking at this check?"

"Is anything the matter?" I said, rising at once.

"I don't know, but I wish you'd look at it, sir, and at the man, too," he added, in a low tone.

"Why?" I asked. "What do you mean?"

By this time I was beside the old man. "What is it, Peters! You're positively trembling; what's the matter?"

"He's like Jenkins!" said the old man, sinking his voice to a mysterious whisper.

"Confound Jenkins!" I exclaimed. "Are we never to hear the last of that scoundrel?"

I had a great mind to turn back, but somehow I didn't do it. The old man's excitement had, I suppose, affected me too. I followed him into the outer office, but it was under protest. I once more let the subject of Jenkins enter my mind, but it was with the firm resolve that it should be the last time.

Peters silently handed me a check when I came out; it was Lord Lowestoft's check, and appeared to be all right.

"Well," I said, in a whisper, "this is all right. What is the matter?"

"Look at him, sir," said Peters, in the same tone, indicating the counter with his finger. "Only look at him, sir. That's what I wanted you for."

I took two steps, and commanded a view of the counter. I started! He stood carelessly leaning against the counter, his face turned partly away as he looked through the door into the street. He was tall and dark, with black hair, curly, and worn long. From below it, as he stood, part of his right ear showed plainly. It was small, slightly pink in color, and exquisitely delicate in shape. For a moment I stared at him almost stupidly. The feeling of cold surprise that had seized me had the mastery. Then I turned away.

"Give me the check," I whispered to Peters. With a curious look upon his face the old man handed it to me without a word. "Lowestoft" was the name at the bottom, and the amount was five hundred pounds. The check was regular, there was an ample balance to his

lordship's credit. In the ordinary course the check should have been paid at once. I stepped to the counter. The owner of the check turned and faced me. For a moment I thought he hesitated. For a single instant I saw, or fancied I saw, his dark cheek grow a shade paler. If it did so it passed as quickly, and he looked me steadily in the face. Was I wrong in thinking that gaze a little too steady? Was it only fancy that made me see in it disinclination suppressed by force of will? I don't know about that, but I do know that it was some moments before I could have spoken to him. It was Jenkins himself who stood before me. The same features, the same flashing black eyes, only not so calm; the same hair, only longer and more curly. To crown all, it was the same voice that now spoke in a quiet but rather supercilious tone:

"May I ask you to make haste? I am rather hurried."

With an effort I recovered myself. I looked steadily at him, and replied,—

"This is your check, sir, I understand."

"Lord Lowestoft's?" he asked, impatiently glancing at it. "Yes, it is mine. Will you kindly get it cashed?"

"Certainly. Will you kindly endorse it?" And I pushed it towards him across the counter, as I spoke.

"Endorse it?" he repeated, angrily. "What do you mean? Why should I endorse it?"

"It is merely as a form, sir, that we wish you to do so. The amount is a large one, and it is a custom of ours in such cases."

He looked at me as I spoke. I had seen that look before from just such a pair of black eyes as looked at me now.

"No, sir!" he replied, fiercely. "I will not endorse

it. Do I understand that you refuse to pay it without?"

Till that moment I had never thought of such a thing. Till he spoke my only object had been the vague one of seeing and hearing him speak, so as, if possible, to set at rest the wild doubt that would not be shaken off. It was the tone of his voice that decided me. I spoke calmly, I believe, but very decidedly.

"Yes," I said, "you may understand that. The request may be unusual, sir, but the refusal is much more uncommon. We are prepared to pay the check, but—excuse me, sir—you are an entire stranger to us."

"As you please. I will inform Lowestoft of your reply. You can arrange it with him."

As he spoke he reached out his hand for the check; he exposed the wrist. There, yes, there, just where I had seen it on Jenkins's wrist, was the blue scar. He thrust the check angrily into his pocket; without another word he turned away from the counter and left the bank.

For a few seconds I stood looking after him, then I turned hastily and went back to my room. I wanted to think what it all meant, and to be alone while I did it. I can't say that I found thinking of much use. The naked fact stared me in the face, and like many other naked things the sight was hardly agreeable. I had sworn to Jenkins on the strength of his ears, his eyes, his hair, and the scar on his wrist, and Jenkins had been found guilty. And here were all four presenting a check at the bank, and I could have sworn to all four again.

It might have been half an hour when Lord Lowestoft's carriage drove up hastily, and I was sent for. I found his lordship in a towering rage. He was accompanied by my visitor of half an hour before, and

when I came out he held his check in his hand. I knew him well, but he hardly acknowledged me by a nod when I came out. Holding out the check, however, he demanded, angrily,—

“How does it happen that you refused to pay my check?”

His lordship's tone was rude. His lordship's look was threatening. Once more I may remark that Englishmen dislike rudeness when it is shown to themselves. I resented his lordship's rudeness on the spot.

“This gentleman has misinformed you, my lord. I did not refuse to pay your check. I merely asked him to endorse it.”

“And why the devil, sir, should he endorse it? You know my signature, I presume?”

“Certainly, my lord; but I wished to know to whom I was paying so large a sum of money.”

“You're deucedly inquisitive then, I must say. And for the future I shall protect my friends from impertinence.”

“Your lordship will do as you please elsewhere, but here we shall exercise our undoubted right whenever we think there is any occasion for it.”

“Very good, sir, very good! So far as my business is concerned, you will not be troubled. What is the balance?” he added, turning to Peters, to whom he had evidently spoken before I came in.

“Nineteen hundred and sixty-five pounds, five shillings, and nine pence.”

“I will take it now,” said his lordship, shortly.

“Take Lord Lowestoft's check for his balance, Mr. Peters,” I said. “Give it him in Bank of England notes, and close his lordship's account.”

As I turned away my eyes rested once more on his

companion; he was leaning easily against the desk, a half smile on his dark face. He had made no remark; it was evidently quite unnecessary. I didn't like the man's face. It was Jenkins's face with a difference, animated by a worse disposition. Who was the man? The impulsive desire to learn his name had already cost the bank a good account, and had also cost me a loss of temper. And yet I was no nearer knowing the name than before. It can hardly be wondered at that I was not in love with Jenkins's counterpart, that I looked at him with no very friendly eyes. No doubt he saw it, for he looked at me, and his lips curled in a sarcastic smile. I may be prejudiced, but the face seemed to me a bad one. There was a wild reckless look in the eyes, but there seemed to me a cold look also. It was a handsome face, certainly,—what you call a patrician face,—but bad at the same time, and cruel. I returned the man's look steadily, and he looked away. For some reason he didn't like it; he objected to face me.

The notes were handed to Lord Lowestoft, and he was about to put them in his pocket. I stopped him.

"Oblige me by counting them," I said, quietly.

He glanced at me hastily, but he did so.

"They're all right," he said, half sulkily, as he pushed them into his pocket.

"Good afternoon, then, my lord."

"Good afternoon," he replied, turning hastily away. —"Come along, Fortescue, we're late already!"

As he spoke he left the bank. His companion hastily followed him.

The name, then, was Fortescue. By accident I had learned so much as this, after trying to find it out in vain.

That is all. I have heard nothing of Jenkins since then. I have seen nothing more of Fortescue. If there was more than a coincidence in all this I shall probably never know it. If there is a mystery here it is likely to remain a mystery to me. If the doctor is right I may perhaps learn the truth by and by, perhaps not,—who knows? In the mean time this is all I have to tell. I only hope I may not have been too hasty and positive. I pray God I may not have been the means of condemning an innocent man!

PART II.
IN THE STORM.

CHARLES FORTESCUE'S STORY.

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CHAPTER I.

FOR many years past I have meant to tell the story of certain passages in my life, but hitherto I have always shrunk from doing so. Those who may read it when it is written will be able to understand and excuse the feeling. Past troubles are said to be a source of pleasure to some people, but I can safely say that my own, though long since past, are far from affording any pleasure to me. This may arise from their nature; it may also arise in part from mine. Yet I suppose there are some misfortunes so great that the recollection of them becomes a vague horror; some dangers that were at once so terrible and so imminent that their memory must always bring a shudder to one who only just escaped them. This must have been my case. Thank God! the storm has long since passed away, and I have had my share of calm, and more than a common share of life's sunshine since then. Yet there are times when the shadow of the tempest rests upon me still, and some of the horror of the past will be with me, I think, to the very end.

For my own sake I should never have written this. Few people know the story, and those few will soon

have passed away. It is in justice to others that I now recall the painful past. The story may have little interest for strangers: for my children at least it should have much. For their sakes therefore I write it. For their satisfaction I wish to leave a record as faithful and minute as my memory can now command. In telling it I must necessarily cast imputations upon another whom I would, had it been possible, have sheltered from blame. Fortunately, that other can no longer be affected by its severity. Long years ago he passed to another tribunal than ours.

What I have to tell is the story of a shipwreck—a shipwreck in which a life went down,—socially, physically, morally, went down into the deep. It is the story also of a rescue, tardy indeed, and only not just too late, but of a rescue still. It will tell how the storm came down, sudden and unlooked for, upon a human soul. It will tell how his sky was overcast, and the lights of his heaven were obscured, how the storm increased, and his vessel went to pieces. It will show how the shipwrecked man battled with the waves, and for a time struggled against his fate; and how he strained his eyes in the vain search for one gleam of light to cheer and sustain him in the struggle; how the gleam of light came not to his prayers, but the sky grew blacker and the storm more fierce, till in despair he was about to sink. It will also tell how Heaven at last was kind, how the storm-cloud parted, and a single star shone out clear, bright, and soft on the eyes of the despairing man; how, encouraged by the light, he made one more effort to escape his doom, and how that effort proved successful. Two figures that stood near my path seem to me to embody the shipwreck and the res-

cue. That of a man represents the storm, that of a woman the star.

To begin with an explanation. I was the younger of twin brothers. Our parents had no other children, our family, one of the oldest in the midland counties, no other representatives. Our father's succession to the title and estates had been unlooked for, and his marriage was a late one. A general officer who had seen much service, his hair was more than gray when he married, it was snowy-white when my earliest memories bring him back to me. Of my mother I have no remembrance, and my father never named her in my hearing. A sweet but vague painting in water-colors, which from my earliest childhood hung in his study (and now hangs before me where it hung then), represented all that my brother or myself ever knew of a mother. Our father was a proud man. A life of honorable service, rewarded by many medals and many scars, had something, no doubt, to do with this; the traditions of a family famous for its pride and its honorable conduct had, perhaps, more. The first sentiments I ever heard from him were sentiments of personal honor and of family pride. The first and the last impression he made on me was that honor was everything, life comparatively nothing. I think my father was fond of me. I know that I was fondly, almost passionately, attached to him. He took less notice of me indeed than my brother, on whom he looked as the representative of the family, but I fancy—I like still to fancy—that he loved me more. Stern as his manner always was, it softened sometimes when he looked at me: it seldom did so when he looked at George. There is something in natural affinity, after all. He might not know it, and he might be unwilling

to believe it, but he could not escape the feeling that I could understand and sympathize with him, and that George could not.

My brother and I were wonderfully alike. As little children, I have heard it said, we could hardly be distinguished even by our nurses. In features, in height, in complexion, we grew to boyhood and to youth with the ideal likeness of twins.

It was a foolish notion of distinguishing us in some way that led to the abrupt dismissal of the nurse we had looked on almost as a mother. She was, it seems, of gypsy blood, and she allowed one of her own people to mark us on the wrist. I am sure the man deceived her into supposing it would not hurt us, for when she found he had burnt our arms, she cried bitterly for hours. I had rather have died than told, but George told my father, and she was dismissed within an hour. The burns were not severe; they were made with some acid, I suppose, and they soon healed; but they left a mark on the right wrist of each of us in exactly the same place. The mark was drawn round the edge of a half-crown which poor nurse gave her gypsy friend; only George's was drawn round the upper and mine round the lower edge of the coin.

Like as we were in features and appearance, we were but little alike in other respects. George was always full of energy and enterprise. Anything wild, daring, and dangerous had a charm for him, and he led me into every boyish scrape that I can remember. As a child and boy I had always followed his lead. At home he was always treated as first, and I accepted the second position as natural, both there and at school. In study, it is true, George was always backward; but that only led to my doing his exercises and verses, and even his

impositions for him at Eton. In the playing fields he was a natural leader. Daring, reckless, and imperious, he was looked up to by us all there, and by me most of all. To do his work and ward off his punishments seemed my natural vocation.

I believe he loved me. I know I loved him with an instinctive, unreasoning sort of love, common, I fancy, in dogs, but hardly known to human beings except in the mysterious relation of twins. Throughout our childhood we were never separated; through our school-days we were always together; and the separation, when it did come, was the first great trial of my life. We left Eton together, George to join a cavalry regiment as cornet, and I to go to Oxford. Such a separation is really final. We are so much the creatures of circumstances that it needs only various surroundings to make different men of natures the most alike. Our natures had really little in common, and it needed only differing circumstances to complete the loss of resemblance.

I spent nearly four years at Oxford, among books and men of books. George spent the same years among the temptations of a fast regiment, generally about town. I did not see him often, but when I did it was only for a day at a time, when he ran down to Oxford, or when I came up to London. These chance meetings told me little about my brother. You need to see much of one you have known well before you discover that you know him no longer. I had ceased to know George, but I did not suspect the truth. In externals we were still the same. People still declared they couldn't tell us apart, and so far, at least, as I was concerned, the old affection, or something like it, still remained. The stories of his doings that he would tell

when we met sounded strange and wild to my sober experience, but, after all, they seemed natural enough for him, and were only renewals of many an Eton adventure on a wider field. I couldn't fail to see that they were wild, but I couldn't criticise them in George as I would in any one else.

The four years had passed. I had taken my degree, not without distinction, and came up to London with the idea of reading for the bar. George's regiment was not in town, so I saw nothing of him. I was daily and eagerly expecting him on a short visit which he had promised to make, however, when I received a letter instead. Strangely enough, I have that letter now; it is as follows:

IPSWICH, December 10, 1832.

DEAR CHARLEY,—

Don't expect me in town, after all. I'm awfully sorry to disappoint you, but I must be off to the continent for a month or two, and I don't want the fellows in town to be asking my reason. I may tell you, however, that I'm in a devil of a scrape, as usual; that is to say, I should be if it were known. Fortunately, it is not, and I don't think it can possibly be traced. It musn't be this time, for the governor would never get over it. I was a fool to have anything to do with a frolic of the sort; but there, least said soonest mended, and I shall certainly say nothing. Luckily, my own name was never in it. You 'know the old chancery property—our mother's legacy. Fortunately, on this occasion I had the good luck to be Mr. Jenkins of Holby Lodge. I never was so glad of anything in my life. The whole business turned out badly, and I wouldn't for the world the governor knew. Not another soul knows anything of it but yourself, and I know I can

depend on you to say nothing. If any one inquires, tell them I'm not quite the thing, and am off to Paris for a month. Good-bye, old fellow! Sorry I can't come up just now. By the time I do, I suppose you'll be in Chambers, and as musty as they are. Don't overdo it, you know. Yours as usual,

G. FORTESCUE.

That was all; but at the time it made me strangely uneasy. What foolish prank had he been playing? What scrape could he have been in bad enough to make him go away? I puzzled over the letter for days, but could make nothing of it. George had given me no address, and I didn't venture to write to his brother officers to learn one. The only explanation I could think of was that George had been mixed up in some wild practical joke which might have led to some serious accident; but even so, why the assumed name? Why the retreat to France? I put the letter aside, but the vague uneasiness it had created in my mind wouldn't be put aside.

I had to face my father with it hanging over me still, for, of course, he looked for us home at Christmas. Fortunately, George had written to him, and, though he was evidently much annoyed, he asked me no questions, and hardly referred to it when I was there. It was the first Christmas we had failed to meet, and it seemed to make another step in our separation. I came back to town. I got Chambers and began to read law. I had a few college friends engaged in the same way, and gradually I began to form new companionships and new pursuits, so that I felt my brother's absence less than I had expected.

He was away for more than three months, and before

he came back his regiment had gone to Ireland, where, of course, he had to join it. He was in town only for an hour in passing, and I missed him then; he never went near my father at all. I was sorry I missed him, for the uneasy mystery of his letter was with me still. It gradually died away, however, as time went on. Nothing had come of his scrape, whatever it might have been, so he was evidently right. The disguise which seemed to me like disgrace had answered its purpose. For many reasons I was glad, but most of all for my father's sake. He was feeble now, and any shock might prove serious. No shock could be so serious as one that came in the form of dishonor. So the year passed away. So we reached the month of October.

CHAPTER II.

OCTOBER is nearly always melancholy in England; sadder than November, for November speaks in no doubtful accents of winter; sadder by far than winter itself, because the dearest months of the year have a beauty that is all their own. Beneath the snows of winter lie the warmth of spring and the glow of summer. Behind the storm there is the sunshine. October is all retrospect. The weather speaks but of the failing forces of the summer, the landscape tells only of the life of the year sinking to decay. I had always this feeling about October weather ever since I had consciously any impressions of the kind at all. I liked being out of doors, indeed, but it was that I might enjoy the luxury of nature's regrets. Since that October I have had other reasons.

It came upon me suddenly. The great events of our lives, the sovereign crises of our fate, generally do so, and it is well. In surprise, more than in wine, there is truth. It is the real man who confronts the sudden shock, before reflection has had time to warp him into an artificial shape, or the thousand considerations that appeal to his feelings or his prejudices interfere to make him act by rule and speak in the accents of habit. In my own case, at least, it was sudden.

I can remember it now as if it were yesterday. I was sitting in the Park half idle, half meditative. The influence of the season no doubt was upon me, and the sighing of the wind and the coloring of the trees helped

to make me melancholy. At the moment few people in London had less to make them so. I enjoyed study, and study was my employment. I liked society, and our name and family connections ensured me more than enough of that. I had enough for my wants, opportunities for my enjoyments, a future for my ambition. I was not even in love, and yet I was disposed to be melancholy. Is there something saddening in the approach of trouble? Does the spirit feel the shadow of the future falling chill across the sunshine of the present, before the grosser part of the intellect can perceive it? It may be so. What is there, indeed, that may not be?

I was aroused by a voice, apparently addressing me. I looked up; a gentleman stood staring intently at me. So far as I knew, I had never seen the man before, yet he looked at me with a strange vivid look of recognition. It was unfriendly, too; I could feel that instantly. He thought he knew me,—he thought he knew no good of me. What could it mean? Some mistake it must be, of course. And yet,—and yet I was somehow ready at the moment to anticipate trouble. I looked at the gentleman as he looked at me. He seemed puzzled at first, and then angry. It was as if he expected to be recognized, and was angry that he was not. I certainly did not recognize him, so I waited for more. I expected something to follow, and I expected nothing agreeable, without knowing in the least what was to follow,—without the shadow of a forecast of the truth. I think I was unconsciously getting on my guard during these moments of waiting; it was necessary.

The gentleman, still looking sternly in my face, said,—

“Mr. Jenkins, I believe?”

Why was it that the first thought of trouble had recalled George to my mind? Why was it that looking on the angry face of the man brought back the letter—of which I had never had the explanation—to my mind with a shock? Why it was I do not know. But I do know that it was so.

I was scarcely surprised to hear the name. Somehow I seemed almost to have expected it, so vivid at the moment was the impression of George's letter on my memory.

"Jenkins?" I repeated, wonderingly, I dare say, for the name seemed so strange a confirmation of my expectations. "Jenkins? Well, sir, and if so, how can I serve you?"

Why I answered to that name I do not know. It was an impulse. Does one ever know how to account for an impulse? Is it not the result of a thousand unexplained causes in the past, as much as it is the parent of a thousand unexplainable consequences in the future?

The gentleman smiled. I didn't like the smile. It was not friendly. It certainly was not complimentary to me, I thought. I rose from my seat, by no means unwilling to close the interview. He arrested me.

"Of Holby Lodge, near Bristol?" he asked, in a tone of marked and peculiar meaning.

Once more the impulse returned to learn more by acknowledging the address, as I had already acknowledged the name. Once more I gave way to the impulse, though it was with a sense of reluctance. This man—what did he want? Why did he address himself to me? What was the mystery, and how was I involved in it? Then it dawned upon me,—he took me for George. This was the scrape, then, that had driven

George away. This was the business which our father must never hear of. I gave way to the impulse. As I had admitted the name, I now admitted the address,—

“At your service, sir,” I replied. “And what then?”

He looked hard in my face as I spoke, and as he looked he grew still more angry. For a moment he paused; he seemed almost to gasp for breath. What could it all mean? I looked steadily at him. I was anxious to know the meaning of it. I was determined to know. After a pause of a second or two, he recovered himself, and replied,—

“Then will you kindly return the diamond ring of which you robbed me on the 19th of last November?”

He said it slowly, distinctly, venomously. Was the man mad? He didn't look like it. Was I mad, or did I hear amiss? The blood rushed to my heart; then it ebbed away with a strange, sickening sensation. Robbed on the 19th of November last! Was this the frolic? Could it be even wildly possible that this was the scrape? And our father,—George might well say that he would never get over it.

One thing was certain. He must never hear of it, come what might. The mind moves quickly in moments of peril. I seemed in that one second of time to see many things. If this man had indeed lost his ring in some wild frolic, it might be restored—something might, something must be done, anything to get rid of this terrible nightmare of trouble and disgrace. The first thing to be done was, clearly, to hear the facts, the next to approach the man. He didn't, after all, look so formidable. I said something, I hardly knew what, about his being mistaken as to the robber, if he had lost a ring. My object was to learn more of the facts, and if possible also to form some idea of the

man's character. For the moment I was half stupefied by the suddenness of the thing, but still I vaguely fancied the matter might somehow be hushed up quietly. To judge by his face, I had made a mistake. He was evidently angry at what I had said: there was manifest indignation in the way he turned upon me, and in the tone in which he spoke. I had been anxious to hear more of the facts. His next words told me more. They did more than that: they told me all. At the moment they were spoken I scarcely seemed to hear or to understand them. Yet for years since then they have rung in my ears, and even now as I write I seem to hear them still. No wonder! To me they were like the squall that ushers in the tempest, the first blast of the storm in which my life had all but sunk.

"I am under no delusion, sir," he said, sternly. "On the 19th of last November I was robbed of one hundred and twenty-five pounds and a diamond ring by a highwayman who stopped the Dover coach. I lost my ring and my money. Another passenger was less fortunate,—he lost his life!"

A highwayman! Oh, God! had it come to this? Somebody killed! By accident, no doubt; but what of that? The hope of a compromise vanished as he spoke. The idea of restitution went out suddenly like an extinguished candle. I had never till that moment been face to face with a great terror: but I was so now. As he spoke it seemed to approach me. Vague, indistinct, and horrible, it seemed to creep towards me, casting a black shadow over my future as it came, and I could only grope in the darkness. I seemed to myself to have lost sensation. My mind refused to act, my will seemed powerless to make any decision. Then I looked at my accuser, and forced myself to speak once more.

My mouth was dry; my words seemed to cling to my palate like something glutinous. My voice sounded strange and foreign to myself. The gentleman looked at me. To his eyes I must have looked the image of guilt. At last I managed to say,—

“You were robbed, you say, but why do you connect me with the robbery?”

As the words followed one another mechanically, I heard them as if from a stranger, and I felt, even as I spoke them, how weak and foolish they were. “How?” Had he not recognized my face as the face of the robber? Had he not somehow learned the name that George had given? Had I not said that name was mine? His answer came quickly, loudly, and angrily. Up to a point it was the very answer I had looked for. Beyond that—oh, God! beyond that it was still unexpected.

“Because, sir, the robber was Mr. Jenkins of Holby Lodge. Because Mr. Jenkins had my money, which he spent, and my ring, which he refused to give back. Because Mr. Jenkins committed a foul murder on the 19th of last November, and I recognize you as Mr. Jenkins, and charge you with the robbery and the murder.”

The man had stepped back from me as he spoke, and he spoke loudly. Every word fell on my ear like the stroke of a bell. Every word seemed printed on my brain as with a hot iron. Robber! Highwayman! and now, murderer! These epithets were applied by this man to me, but for the moment I hardly noticed that. What did that matter? I knew I was none of these things, but it was George he meant, and he—was he not guilty? Had he not written that letter, every word of which might have been traced by the fingers that wrote in lightning on the Babylonian wall, so

intense was the glare of conviction it now cast upon my mind? Had he not confessed the scrape, the frolic! Oh, God! he had called it a frolic! Had he not given the name by which I was accused? For the moment I could not separate myself from him. For the moment I knew the bitterness which is worse than death.

I stared fixedly in my accuser's face. He said afterwards in court that I looked like a man turned to stone. It may be true. If horror and an awful dread can turn a man to stone, it must be true!

Another voice then broke in, but to my ear it sounded thin and distant, like the sound of a bell far up a mountain-side. It spoke, and my accuser answered it. I understood what was said, but with a vague, unreal kind of understanding. I saw the speaker: he looked like a policeman; but I saw him as figures are seen in dreams.

He spoke to me, and I believe I answered him; but I have no remembrance of what passed. Behind him, like a ghastly background, I seemed to see a gallows and the figure of my brother standing there—a criminal, doomed to die. Through the sound of his voice and of mine, I seemed to hear over and over again in ever deeper and more dreadful tones, the words, "Committed a foul murder on the 19th of November last." The vision never for an instant left my eyes, the sound was never absent for an instant from my ears and brain.

At last we walked away, we three together, the policeman, the accuser, and myself. I went mechanically. I had no idea where we were going. I had no interest whatever in the question. For the moment life seemed to have come to a dead stop. Sensation alone was left. Thought, will, reflection—all were in abeyance. Instinct, however, remained, and even here instinct was serviceable. It was instinct that made me cling to

the name I had acknowledged, that made me refuse to give any address or name of any friend. I know vaguely that I was taken from the place. I felt rather than saw faces that stared at me with some surprise and much curiosity. At last I was alone. Instinctively I knew that it was a prison. The bare walls, the heavy door, the small and barred window, all so unfamiliar to my experience, were all familiar enough to my imagination. It was a prison. There was a bed in a corner. Stupidly I sat down upon the bed. Stupidly I looked around on the place. I scarcely felt any surprise. I hardly was conscious of any sensation. It was growing dark, and I was dimly conscious that I was weary. Mechanically I stretched myself upon the bed. Mechanically I closed my eyes, and instantly lost consciousness.

It was broad daylight when I awoke, and two men were standing beside me. One, from his dress, was an official, the other was apparently a doctor. The first sound I heard was the voice of the official.

"This man," he said, "was brought in last night on a charge of murder and robbery. He must have fallen asleep almost at once, and we have found it impossible to awake him."

"Since what hour did you say?" asked the other, briskly.

"Since about five o'clock yesterday."

"Twenty hours! A good, long sleep; but no harm done. Sleep is natural, too; probably a shock to the nervous system. Didn't expect to be caught, eh?" And the doctor laughed pleasantly, as if the idea was gratifying.

"Well perhaps so, but I don't remember another case like it in all my experience."

"Likely enough ; it isn't everybody in the criminal line who has nerves like this fellow. This is a gentleman, too, by the look of him. Depend upon it, however, there is no harm done. A sleep like that would restore a dozen murderers. Let him have it out."

The voices died away. The footsteps slowly receded, leaving only distant echoes, and I was left alone. By some instinct I had not opened my eyes wide enough to be observed ; by some chance, rather than design, I had given no sign of awakening while they remained.

I was awake, however, and once more the horror returned. For hours, and more or less for days, I was conscious of little more than this. The prison, with its irksome regulations and its dreary monotony, was scarcely noticed. The preliminary inquiry and committal passed me by like a dream. To this one subject my mind returned, if diverted for a moment, and dwelt upon it with a persistency that was like a craze.

So the days passed on, and little by little they produced an effect. The muscles of the mind, like those of the body, grow accustomed to any strain if only they hold out against the first wrench. The horrible idea of George's guilt and of his danger grew more familiar, and narrowed itself down to smaller compass. Whatever crime had really been committed, I knew that George had been guilty of it. Whatever punishment the law awarded to the crime, I knew, if only he were accused and tried, he stood in deadly peril of. Gradually my feelings towards him were changing, too. My twin brother I still loved as I had always loved him ; but this man who had done this deed of shame and violence seemed to be a stranger to me. I didn't love, I almost hated him.

It was long before any sense of personal danger came home to my mind. George's crime and his danger weighed on me like a nightmare. In the middle of the night I would start from my sleep trembling in every limb, a cold perspiration running down my face, appalled by the vision of his punishment. Or I would picture to myself my father learning the news that his eldest son was to be tried for robbery and murder. My mind was tortured with fancies and racked with forebodings, but at this time they were all for others—none of them for myself.

The actual position of matters came home to me when the governor told me gravely that the day was fixed for the trial; did I wish to communicate with my friends? Did I wish to consult any professional adviser? I said I would consider the matter, and he left me. It was a shock, but it was scarcely a surprise. In a certain vague way I had known it all along. When I answered to the name of Jenkins I felt that I was taking a responsibility on my shoulders. Now, however, the question was plainly before me, and I seemed for the first time fully to understand it. I had taken my brother's place; was I prepared to keep it to the end? Under any other circumstances the question would not have been worth considering. If things had been in any way different I should, of course, have proved my own innocence and let George, if need be, prove his. As it was, this was impossible. For my brother to be accused was, I felt sure, to be condemned. Did I not know that he was the man? Had he not, in confessing his scrape and acknowledging his assumed name, rendered his guilt certain to my mind?

I was not a hero in this matter. I was only, as all of us are, the creature of circumstances. To George I

felt sure it was a matter of life and death. If once accused, he would not escape—I seemed to know it. On the other hand, I might escape. I knew I was innocent, and I had no distinct idea of the evidence likely to be brought against me to prove me guilty. I could not doubt that the case would break down, and if so, all would be saved.

George! I confess I shuddered now when I thought of him, and yet I felt, come what might, he must be saved. My father—I had almost ceased to think of him as having two sons—my father would escape a blow which must, I felt sure, be fatal. The old honorable name of our house—the name that had come down untarnished by disgrace through five hundred years—that, too, would be saved. No one would know me, or was likely to recognize a Fortescue in John Jenkins, accused of murder and acquitted. Everything depended on my silence; it was not much for my father's son to decide that everything should depend upon himself. Everything hinged on my resolution; I need hardly say that it was quickly taken. The risk to me did not seem very great; but, great or small, it was clearly a risk to be run.

When the governor came to know my decision, it was ready. I had no friends with whom I wished to communicate, no desire to employ any professional assistance. He looked at me gravely for a few seconds, then he turned away. As he went he said, "You know your own affairs best; but I think you are unwise. Should you change your mind, send for me."

I shuddered, but I didn't change my mind. So the days went by, so the year advanced into November, and the day of the trial came on.

CHAPTER III.

THE trial did not take me unawares. Before it came on I had considered what my position was likely to be. So far as I could foresee it, I was ready to meet it. My one great fear was the fear of recognition. If nobody knew me, the danger seemed to me to be trifling. I knew, indeed, that the resemblance between myself and George was striking; but, after all, a mere resemblance was little. I did not know how the identity of name was known or how it was to be proved, and against that I had no means of providing. In one way, the more I thought about it the more serious it appeared. Once or twice I even thought of a lawyer, but two things withheld me from employing one. A lawyer, to begin with, meant expense, and I knew enough of the matter to know that a lawyer with a half confidence was almost more dangerous than none. No, I would stand alone. So long as I was unrecognized, the disgraceful secret would remain a secret still. If the worst came to the worst, the disgrace might die with John Jenkins, and no one else need be the wiser. And so the day came.

Curiosity had never taken me into a court of justice, and the scene was to me at first strange and impressive. It was a foggy day in November. Lamps were lighted in the street as we passed. Lamps were burning dimly in the passages, and even in the court itself when we got there. It was crowded. The strange, swimming, foggy air, half lit up by the yellow glare of the lamps,

made the hundreds of faces present look like thousands. A mass of human faces is always an impressive thing, but a mass of faces turned upon oneself, turned with a curiosity wholly unmixed with friendly interest, this is terrible. If these hundreds of faces had been those of the Gorgons, they could hardly have been more dreadful. It is not the face, but the soul that shows through the mask of the face, that is human. Horror is a thing not of features, but of expression. A crowd without pity is an assemblage of Gorgons. It was on such a crowd that I looked through the murky light of the Old Baily Court on the 19th of November, 1833.

For a moment it overcome me. I shuddered. Of all human troubles, loneliness in misfortune is the most inhuman, and therefore the most hard to bear. Of all kinds of loneliness, that which finds itself face to face with a crowd of fellow-creatures is the most terrible. It was only for a moment, after all. What could it matter to me what these people thought of John Jenkins? If nobody among that crowd knew Charles Fortescue, I might well endure their stare of curiosity. This was the question, and this question I was bent on solving. It was an anxious moment. From row to row I scanned these faces. From tier to tier my eyes followed them down. They seemed to glare on me with hard, stony eyes, and in return I stared at them. What these thousand human but not human-looking eyes thought of me as they looked, I knew not, and I cared nothing. Was there one pair that could identify me? That was everything. Thank God! there was not. To every eye I was John Jenkins, to none Charles Fortescue. I drew a long breath of relief; the greatest anxiety was gone. Now I felt that the worst that

could happen was not the worst that might have happened.

I could observe now what was going on, and I could observe it with some interest. The entrance of the judge, the impanelling of the jury, all the formality of the court, passed before me, and in all I could take an interest such as a spectator might have taken. To my own consciousness the whole scene was unreal. As the actor looks at the audience across the footlights, so, it seemed to me, I looked from the dock at the crowded court. It was all but a performance. The trial was not a real trial; the accused was not a real person. And yet through all this feeling there was somewhere behind it all the feeling that, real or unreal, it had a serious interest for me. I exerted myself to comprehend what was being said and done, and after a time I succeeded. Gradually I became more interested. It seemed to me, indeed, that somebody else was being tried; but I had an interest in the person. I watched the faces of the witnesses, I watched the expression of the jury; I glanced from time to time at the judge, and my eyes even wandered over the mass of faces in the audience, as if to gather opinions as to what was said.

As the trial went on the interest grew greater. I seemed to be hearing the story of a crime just as any one else might hear it; only it was a crime that had a special interest for me. I had no lawyer to defend me, and I don't think I should have gained much by having one. So far as I was concerned, only one defence was feasible. I was not the man. So far as the man who did the deed was concerned, no defence was possible for him.

The evidence of the crime was complete. The rec-

ognition of George would have been complete had he been where I was. The tracing of the notes, the use of the name Jenkins, were explained in order, and satisfactorily explained. There was but one question remaining,—there was only one defence left,—was I the man who stopped the coach? Was I the man who was the friend of the major at the Norfolk Arms Inn? I did not think I had been so like my brother. The banker seemed hardly to have a doubt of my identity. It is true he went chiefly by the scar, but nothing could shake his belief that the scar was the same. His evidence was strong, but after all it was only one. To my surprise everybody seemed equally sure. The coachman, the guard, the French passenger, none of them seemed to have a doubt. I could feel that it was growing serious. The confidence I had felt in my own sense of innocence began to ebb away, as each question I asked seemed to find the witnesses more certain, and to leave the jury more solemn-looking. I could not blame the witnesses. As they told their stories, I felt sure they believed them wholly true. There was only one flaw, and it was one they could scarcely be expected to perceive. If I had been one of the jury, I think they would have convinced me. If I had been one amongst that staring sea of faces that looked on, I think I too would have looked more and more sternly at the accused man.

For the first time I began to realize what I had done. In all my dreams the vision had been of George's shame and George's punishment. It began to dawn upon me now that the shame and the punishment might be not George's, but my own. It was a shock; but it was a shock of a new kind. It is one thing to be weighed down by the sense of guilt, even the guilt of

another, and a very different thing to be alarmed at a danger. The new sensation did me good ; it roused me.

Up to this moment all had been unreal. I was taking part in a performance, and acting the part of another man. Now I felt that my life was at stake, and now I fought as one fights for life. I could see it in the faces of the jury and of the lawyers who were present. I had been quite uninteresting to the bar before ; I could see that I interested them now. They watched eagerly for my questions to each witness ; they looked eagerly at the witnesses for the answers.

Even the spectators seemed to enjoy it. The old gladiator taste has survived the old gladiator shows. It had only been a trial for murder before ; it was a struggle for life now. I certainly succeeded better ; more than one witness made mistakes, more than one evidently failed when pressed to remember clearly all that he had sworn to at first. The Frenchman's evidence turned out to be good for nothing. The coachman and guard had evidently only a vague idea of the appearance of the robber, after all. Two witnesses only were clear and unshakable. Two only I could do nothing with,—the banker and the inn-keeper. Mr. Marvin remembered all about the crime, and all about the interview. The inn-keeper remembered all about the notes, and professed to remember my own face clearly. One by one the witnesses were examined ; one by one they answered my questions. Then the case for the crown was finished.

I called no witnesses, and the impression was a bad one. I felt it, yet I did not feel hopeless. There were only two points on which I could rely, and I tried to make the most of them. I took it for granted that the witnesses were correct as to the crime. I only con-

tended that they were in error as to the criminal. I pointed out that the circumstances were all against accurate observations and all in favor of mistakes. I dwelt on the snow, the failing light, the natural agitation of a man unaccustomed to danger. I appealed to the jury not to condemn an innocent man on testimony which could not be accurate, though it might be precise and circumstantial. Then I spoke of the notes. I asked where the evidence was that connected me personally with them. I demanded to know where the major was, who was the only person sworn to as having had the notes. In a word, I did my best. I felt that my life was at stake, and I fought as men fight for life.

As I called no witnesses, the crown did not reply to my address. The judge did so, however. I know of no torture so exquisite as that of listening in silence while one's life is being talked away. He was an old man, but his voice was clear and solemn. Every sentence fell on my ear like a death knell: every word he uttered seemed to take away from me one more chance of life. The judge evidently believed in my guilt, and he was apparently anxious that I should not escape. At last—it seemed an age—but at last he finished.

It had long since grown dark. The yellow hazy light from the lamps had long been the only light in court. The heavy, murky atmosphere had grown heavier and more murky than ever in the crowded court-house. The faces looked strange and ghastly in the half light of the court, and stranger and more ghastly yet in the more than half darkness of the gallery. The jury rose, and a low inarticulate buzz arose in the court—the sound of many voices whispering. After a time the jury retired. Then the buzzing grew

louder. The lawyers leaned over the seats and laughed and talked gayly. The spectators talked to one another in loud whispers. The policemen alone stood silent at their posts. One of them put a chair into the dock, and I sat down upon it and waited. I felt stunned at first. The address of the judge had actually confused me. Little by little, as he spoke, I had begun to lose consciousness of my own identity. As he produced the proofs, arranged them one by one, and connected them with myself, my own defence seemed to melt away from me. More and more, as he went on, I seemed to identify myself with the criminal, and almost to believe that the actions sworn to must, after all, have been my actions. When he finished I could hardly understand why there should have been a delay. I could scarcely fancy anything left for the jury to discuss.

Vaguely these thoughts drifted through my mind as I waited: vaguely I looked around the crowded court and caught the sound of the murmured whispers. The position was a terrible one, but I was fast losing conscious hold upon it. The court, with its crowded seats, its dim swimming atmosphere, and its flaring yellow lights, was like a place seen in a dream. The faces round me were no longer real faces, but seemed to come up like phantoms, now standing out clear and threatening, now retreating vague and indistinct into the distance, a mere vista of imaginary faces. The whispers that filled the air had a ghostly sound, but no meaning to my ears, and served only to increase the general impression of unreality. Still the jury didn't return, and still I sat and waited. Once or twice the thought came to me for a moment, "They are actually in doubt about hanging me." I was only vaguely im-

patient of the long delay; for the most part I was merely absorbed in my fancies.

At last there was a stir in the court. Hasty steps sounded in the passage; a crowd of faces turned simultaneously towards the same door, and then, slowly, solemnly, one by one, the jury came back.

They took their seats and looked about them. They were the centre of observation now. Like the rest, I looked at them. Like the rest, I suppose, I wondered what they had come to say. It didn't seem to concern me much, but somehow I felt curious. Then there was another stir in the court. The judge was coming back, and all eyes were turned upon him. Like the rest, I looked at him, too. Like the rest, I seemed to myself to expect him to do something. He did nothing but settle himself in his seat and nervously shuffle the papers before him. Then some one asked the jury if they had agreed on their verdict. Then the voice said again, "How say you, gentlemen of the jury, is the prisoner guilty or not guilty?" The man—he was a little man with kindly eye and a snub nose—looked at me nervously for an instant. Every man in the jury-box did the same, and I looked at them. Then he said, "Guilty!" I thought his voice trembled as he said it.

The officer of the court turned to the judge, who sat behind him, and said something. The judge gathered his gown around him and nervously fingered the wig on his head. Then he leaned forward in his chair and looked at me. I looked at him in return.

The verdict had scarcely been any shock to me, I think, and once more the whole scene had ceased to have any personal significance. I knew that I was standing there. I knew that the judge was speaking. I felt that the eyes of everybody in the court were

fixed upon my face, but it didn't somehow seem to be mine at all. I found myself sympathizing with George. I even found myself wondering what he felt. I can't say I heard what the judge said. His words passed me by like most of the words we hear in dreams. They were a sound, and they seemed to fill up the picture, but they conveyed no ideas to my mind; or, if they did, the ideas were at once wiped out by others that crowded after them.

I stood staring at the judge until a hand was laid on my arm. It was not rough nor unkindly, but it was urgent,—I was to go. I glanced round; there, in front of me, was the judge leaning back in his chair, taking a black silk cap from his head. There were the jury looking, I thought, anxious and ill at ease. There was the moving background of human faces looking only curious. I looked at it all as one looks for the last time on a picture. I turned away quietly and followed the policeman. I was a condemned criminal!

CHAPTER IV.

LIKE a man in a dream, I heard the sentence ; like a man in a dream, I followed the policeman. To this day I can distinctly recall the scene, but it is still like a scene from a dream. Terrible as the issue was to me, it affected me very little at the moment. Quietly I left the dock, a condemned man ; quietly, as a condemned man, I went back to prison. I noticed little things, I remember, although my mind had grown dull to great ones. A poor woman, with a ragged child in her arms, stands out from the picture, now. She held him up as we passed, and told him to look at the "gentleman highwayman." I remember looking at her thin white face and sunken eyes, and wondering whether she was as hungry as she looked. I noticed that I was not taken back to my old cell when we reached the prison. I had grown accustomed to that cell, as one grows accustomed to anything, and I asked the warden why I was moved. The man looked at me as if surprised at the question.

"Why, sir, we always move them, you know," he said.

"Oh, indeed," I replied ; but I had not an idea what he meant. The new cell was larger than the old one, but the lamp that shone in from the corridor above the door was a dim one, and gave the place a weird and ghostly look. Mechanically I sat down on the bed. The warden stood looking at me curiously for a moment ; then he spoke again,—

"Would you like anything particular for supper?"

"No," I said, wearily, looking at him with some surprise. "No. Why do you ask me to-night?"

He looked at me still. I thought he was going to answer my question, but he did not. Instead of that he only stared at me harder, and a strange wondering look passed over his face. Then he spoke again,—

"Would you like to see the chaplain to-night?"

"Not that I know of. Why should I?"

He said no more, but turned slowly away, and left me. His key turned in the door with a harsh creak that grated on my nerves. His footsteps sounded hollow on my ear as step by step they receded and the echoes died away. I was alone.

I was alone, yet not alone. As I looked round me vaguely in the dim yellow light that half lighted up my cell, its dimness seemed alive with figures. My father, with his white hair and his stern gray eyes, seemed to gaze at me sorrowfully from one corner. My brother seemed to pass and repass across the darker end of the cell,—now looking as he did when we were at Eton together, again as I had seen him later when I was at Oxford, and then again as he had been described by the witnesses at the trial. Other faces, some strange, some familiar, would peer at me out of the darkness, shifting, changing, disappearing, as I stared at them, like the shadows from a magic lantern,—now it was the judge, now the counsel for the crown, now the foreman of the jury, and now again the thin hunger-worn face of the woman who had held up the child to see me.

Food was brought in and left for me, but I paid no attention to it. To watch the procession of figures, to follow the strange fragments of memories of the past, that unconsciously stirred my mind, was employment

enough for me. I must have grown exhausted at last and sunk to sleep, quiet and dreamless, as far as I can remember.

It was late when I awoke, for I had not been disturbed. I can remember wondering why I had not been made to get up at the usual hour, and it was not till I looked round on the strange cell in which I found myself that I remembered the trial of the day before. For a moment I found myself wondering how it had ended. Then the words of the turnkey came back to me for the first time, and their meaning grew clear to my mind. I had been sentenced to death, and this was the condemned cell.

It came on me with a shock, yet, strange to say, at the moment it suggested no thought of fear. The confusion which had so often oppressed my mind throughout the case, oppressed it still. I was shocked, indeed, but I was shocked for George's sake, not my own. "So young!" I found myself whispering to myself. "So young, and condemned to die!" Yet the feeling was one of pity only. The old affection for my twin brother was not gone, but it no longer attached to the man. The brother who had been the leader and friend of childhood and boyhood, the lad who had been the hero of my school days, was still there,—somewhere in the background. The criminal who had disgraced our name, and whose crime, if known, would have killed our father with utter shame, was wholly distinct.

I had not undressed, so I rose at once. The weather had improved, the swimming foggy atmosphere of yesterday had gone, and there was even a wan gleam of sunshine falling on the floor near the grated window. Mechanically I began to pace up and down the cell, mechanically I paused whenever I reached the little

patch of sunshine on the floor. The monotonous motion seemed to lend monotony to my ideas. The one constant impression was that some one was to die, and to die young. The one constant sensation was a sensation of vague pity for the misfortune.

I was interrupted by the turnkey, who opened the door and brought in breakfast. The man was civil, and urged me to eat. I felt no hunger, but to get rid of him I promised, and he left me. It was strange, but this man's face only added one more to the ghostly faces that haunted me now. It was friendly, but it was inquisitive, like the face of a man who expected to see something curious when he looked at me.

I ate my breakfast and found that I had been hungry, but the eating made no difference to my thoughts. Still the same hazy procession of scenes and faces passed before me: still the same vague pity for some one who was and yet was not my brother George, filled my mind, forming a heavy background to the faces.

I had not interrupted my walk to eat. The exercise—four steps and then a short one, then four steps and a short one back—seemed to give me a sense of relief, or at least to keep my mind from growing wholly stagnant. Then I was interrupted again. The door opened, and behind the turnkey were two figures. One was the governor, the other—I had seen him in chapel on Sundays—was the chaplain. The turnkey stood aside to let them pass, and said something to the governor as he did so. I nodded to my visitors, but I walked on. The governor was an elderly man with white hair but a figure that was still soldierly and upright.

“Jenkins,” he said, “I have brought the chaplain to see you, and I have a message to give you.”

I stopped in my walk when he spoke. I looked at the chaplain. I waited to hear the message. He looked at me for an instant and then went on.

"You will listen to what the chaplain has to say to you. I hope you will profit by it. The message I have to give you is a question. Mr. Marvin wants to know what you did with the diamond ring. He is anxious to recover it, and of course you can gain nothing now by concealment."

As he began to speak I looked at him. As he went on my look seemed to affect him. The color, rose a little in his cheek as he spoke. His tone grew more stern as he went on. I looked at him still when he stopped.

"Mr. Marvin?" I said, "I don't know Mr. Marvin. I never saw his ring."

The governor's cheek grew redder, and his voice grew sharp and angry.

"Come, come, my man! What have you to gain by all this now! I could excuse acting before, but it is quite thrown away here." He glanced round the cell as he spoke.

"Pardon me, sir, I fail to understand you. What I have just said is the truth. Mr. Marvin is a stranger to me. If he has lost a ring, he had better apply to the man who took it."

As I spoke I stared him full in the face. As I ceased I could see his eye grow troubled and the calm fade gradually from his face.

"And you positively deny all knowledge of the ring?" he said, after a moment's pause.

"Sir, you are speaking to a gentleman, I hope, and you insult him by your question."

The governor looked at the chaplain, and the chap-

lain at the governor, and both shook their heads gravely.

"This is a case for you, sir, if any one can hope to be of use in such a case." And the governor shrugged his shoulders and left the cell.

I was glad he was gone, and I at once resumed my walk. The chaplain sat down on my bed and looked at me. The turnkey, who had brought a stool, sat down upon it just inside the door.

These men disturbed me, and I felt annoyed at their intrusion. Neither of them spoke. After several turns up and down the cell I stopped opposite the chaplain and looked at him. He was a thin, hard-featured man, with black hair and dull beady-looking eyes.

"Pardon me, sir," I remarked, "but to what do I owe the pleasure of your company?"

"I have come, my young friend," he said, and then he paused and looked at me solemnly, as if he expected to impress me greatly by the look.

"So I see," I replied, impatiently. "But as you came uninvited, perhaps you will be good enough to mention your business and go."

He was evidently taken by surprise, and it was equally evident that he was annoyed. His sallow cheek flushed, and there was an angry and offended sparkle in his fishy eyes.

"Are you aware of your position?" he said, angrily.

"Certainly. And of yours; you are sitting on my bed."

He rose indignantly, and stared at me in mingled anger and astonishment.

"Oh, hardened young man!" he exclaimed. "Can you jest when death is approaching? Can you indulge in scoffs and ribaldry when judgment is at the door!"

I did not understand him in the least, and I made no effort to do so. The man was ungentlemanly and distasteful to me, and my one desire was to get rid of him.

"I don't quite catch your meaning, reverend sir," I said, "but I am obliged to you for getting off my bed. As I had rather be alone, you will confer a further favor on me by leaving the room."

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, throwing up his hands with a theatrical gesture, "can this be possible? I leave you, hardened sinner, now; yet I will return if you send for me. Do so to-day. To-morrow it will be too late."

"Thank you," I replied; "I don't think I need trespass further on your kindness to-day, and I fail to understand your reference to to-morrow."

He stared at me for an instant as if paralyzed by my audacity, then he turned and left the cell, muttering to himself as he did so,—

"And that man will be hanged at nine to-morrow morning!"

The turnkey grinned, and, muttering, "Game enough, anyhow!" picked up his stool and followed him. Once more the door shut with a hollow crash. The bolt creaked harshly as it shot in the lock. The footsteps died away in distant echoes through the long corridors. I was left alone.

But his last muttered words remained. "That man will be hanged at nine to-morrow morning." I repeated them over to myself, vaguely, at first; then with more intelligent meaning; then with full understanding.

It was of me—me, Charles Fortescue—that the words had been spoken. The confusion cleared from my brain. Memory of the past returned; perception of the present came to me; apprehension of the future seemed to

advance upon me dark and menacing. I stopped in my walk. I staggered. I sat down on my bed. It came upon me like a revelation. My visions were swallowed up in the present reality, and the reality was frightful. Before the trial I had indeed thought of the possibility of this; but it was only as a possibility, an idea without substance. Now it had substance enough. Hanged to-morrow? No one who has not known what it is to see death approach him can even imagine what the feeling is like. No one who has not blushed at the bare idea of ignominy for another, can imagine even faintly the horror of its certainty when it attaches to himself.

To die! Yes, I could do that as well as another. In the wild rush of the battle-field, with the shouts of the combatants in one's ears, it would hardly be an effort to die. In the deadly breach with the stormers, or in the wild tempest, battling for life and meeting death instead, the thing seemed easy. But, hanged to-morrow! The idea was ghastly, horrible, incredible.

How long I sat face to face with despair I do not know. It must have been hours, because once more I was roused by the turnkey bringing food. I looked up at him and nodded. He stopped and looked at me. Perhaps my face told of the struggle of the last few hours.

"Is there anything I can do for you, sir?" he said, kindly.

"Nothing, I thank you."

He looked carefully round the cell as if in search of something, then he left me without a word.

The short day wore on. The little patch of sunlight had long ago travelled to the wall and disappeared. The gray shadows of the evening crept into the cell and stayed there. I was conscious of each change,

yet, in another sense, I was conscious of none. As I sat there my life passed before me in a long procession of events. None of them were striking events but the last. Yet they came on in slow, unbroken order, like an array of ghosts. Scenes in which I had taken part, people I had known, places familiar to me, all came in turn; all glared at me; all passed me slowly by.

I did not think: I merely reflected. Hour after hour I was conscious only of the long succession of images cast on my mind and thrown back as from a mirror. I looked at them as they came. Sometimes I looked back at them regretfully as they passed, but I drifted onward to the next, helplessly, aimlessly.

It grew dark, and the prison lamps were lighted. The turnkey brought my supper and remained with me in the cell. I looked at him as he settled himself in a chair beside the door, but I said nothing. I seemed to know why he stayed. I had heard of it before. I seemed to whisper it to myself. "They don't leave men alone on the last night." I wondered why not, in a vague way; but I said nothing.

The clock struck ten. Could it be possible? Ten! and at nine to-morrow! I had heard of innocent men being executed, but somehow till then I had never thought what it meant. Now I knew. Ten! and before ten struck again the justice of the Creator would be impugned by the murder of an innocent man with every circumstance of ignominy, for the crime of the guilty! Could it be possible?

I paced my narrow cell with feet that never tired. The minutes beat themselves out with the beats of my heart and the heavy pulsations of my brain. One by one the hours struck: each heavy stroke like the breaking of another link that bound me to life. I felt

them in my brain as if something there was jarred at each blow and would break with the succeeding stroke.

And so the awful night wore on. Gradually the motion seemed to affect me. Gradually the acuteness of my feelings grew more dull, and the sharp physical pain of these reverberating strokes of time grew blunted. Still I walked on. The outside lamp burned dimmer and dimmer, my turnkey companion nodded more and more heavily as he vainly tried with heavy lids to follow me in my endless walk. When twelve struck, the agony was as sharp as a torture. The stroke of "one" seemed to fall like a lash upon my aching brain. I seemed to myself to have waited for ages for the stroke of "two," yet when it came I hardly started. Then I began to think of "three." I pictured to myself its sound. I listened to its long echoes as it crept through the corridors, and died into whispers on the stairs a hundred times before it really came. When it did come at last I was disappointed. It sounded dull and muffled on my ear; it made hardly an impression on my brain. Was I falling asleep? I felt myself to make sure; but no, I was awake. How long would it be until "four?" I counted the seconds until they grew into minutes, the minutes until they ate away the hour. Thought of the past had ceased to trouble me; thought of the future beyond the stroke of "four" seemed beyond my power. Literally, I lived in the present; each moment was everything to me.

Dimmer and yet more dim grew the lamp over the door. The shadows of the cell grew darker and more black each minute. Still I paced on as before; I counted the seconds in a whisper; I marked off the minutes on the fingers of my hands.

At last I got confused. First I lost count of the

minutes, and tried in vain to recall how many I had marked. Then I faltered in counting the seconds. The numbers grew mixed as I repeated them, and I found myself repeating them over again. Would "four" never strike? I stopped counting. I listened for the sound till I could fancy it had passed. There was nothing but the heavy breathing of my companion in the cell, the weird sob of the heavy air along the corridors as I strained my ears to listen.

Still I walked on, though at times I staggered as I walked. The walls of the cell began to look strange and distant. The shadows gathered in the corners and assumed the proportions of abysses. The dim light above the door retreated to the distance of a star. Would it never strike?

I seemed to know when it was really coming. I stopped in my walk—I listened. Then with one long shudder it came through the darkness. "One," I heard it fall, but I heard no more. As it struck, something in my brain seemed to crack—I staggered. It was the last thing I heard. The rest is blank.

I awoke. Bright sunlight was streaming on my face. A fresh breeze, bearing a scent as of a thousand flowers, blew on my cheek. Before me, dancing, glistening, sparkling, were the waters of an ocean more intensely blue than I had ever seen in dreams. Far away, like a slate-colored cloud on the horizon, were the outlines of land. Beside me stood a man curiously dressed in coarse cloth, and holding me by the arm. I looked at him vaguely and wonderingly for an instant; then I said, pointing to the cloud, "What is that?"

He looked at me quickly, and a curious spasm seemed to cross his face for a moment as he replied, "Australia, mate!"

CHAPTER V.

THE VOYAGE OF THE TORRES VEDRAS. FROM THE NOTES OF JOHN SIMPSON, M.D.

It will be just twenty-five years next month since I began my book on the "Philosophy of Error," and here I am at this very moment affording a new illustration of error on my own account. As if it wasn't enough to have a book on hand that has already cost me twenty-five years of hard work, and for anything I can see may cost me twenty-five more, if I should last as long, which isn't likely, I must needs agree to write what I can remember of events that happened fifteen years ago. But there. Your true philosopher is never wise for himself; and it's rather a comfort, after all, to be a fool in good company.

My book was at the bottom of the whole business. If it hadn't been for the "Philosophy of Error" I might never have left the Forty-seventh. If I hadn't left the Forty-seventh I should never have gone to Australia. If I hadn't gone to Australia, some, at least, of the things I have to tell would never have happened, and I should not have been asked to write any of them down. Pardon my habit of going to the root of the matter, and thank the "Philosophy of Error" and not me for it.

I had been twenty-five years in the service. I had been at Talavera with Wellington, and had stood on the hill at Albuera when Beresford hurled back the French

from its bloody slopes. By the by, I missed seeing the final charge, because I was at the moment trying a little experiment on a man whose skull was split by a sabre. It didn't exactly succeed, for the man died, but it was interesting, and I missed the charge. I was in the hospitals at Lisbon and in the field at Vittoria. I crossed the Pyrenees with the regiment and had charge of the hospital at Toulouse.

Talk of errors, I should hope I saw errors enough to last a man a lifetime, and illustrate half a dozen philosophies. The Waterloo campaign was mere butchery, and I was glad when it was over. Of course it was good for practice, but one may get too much practice. What I wanted was time to think out my philosophy. You can't think out a philosophy or anything else when every limb you amputate gets jostled as it goes out of the hospital by a case coming in with another that wants amputating.

Yet I don't know that I found garrison life much better, and as for India, why, it is simply a fraud, gigantic, I admit, but a fraud all the same. They say Indian religions were all philosophy. I shouldn't wonder. From what I saw of the religions I can form a tolerable idea of the philosophy. Don't tell me. Philosophy is the creation of reason, and of course it can flourish only in a reasonable climate.

It was the colonel who suggested it at last, and if ever the world should be enlightened by the "Philosophy of Error," the world will owe the benefit to the colonel's suggestion. I don't know whether he was actuated by a pure desire for the world's good. It is just possible, at least I have thought so once or twice since, that he may have thought he had enough of philosophy. I suppose we had discussed it pretty often. An hour or

so after mess of an evening for four or five years isn't much for philosophy, of course, but it might seem enough to the man one was talking to. At any rate the colonel suggested Australia as the very place for me.

The idea struck me at once. A fine climate, a new country. Forty thousand convicts, guilty probably of more errors than any other forty thousand Englishmen alive, were available for illustration, and a new country must be the very place to start a new philosophy. My country owed me a pension for my services, and I owed humanity a new philosophy. I applied to my country to do her duty, and I prepared to do mine.

For a wonder, matters went smoothly, and by the 10th of May, 1834, I was ready to start. It wasn't difficult in those days to get a passage to Australia at the government expense, and I had found no delay in getting a ship to go in. She was the "Torres Vedras," and she was to sail on the 13th May, with convicts for Port Jackson. When I saw the ship in the docks I liked the look of her, and thought she was likely to be comfortable. For anything I know she may have been; I can speak for her passengers—they were not.

On the evening of the 13th I went on board at Gravesend. I have made a good many voyages in my time, and the error of going on board too soon is an error I never commit. She was ready to sail when I went aboard, and she was off the Foreland when I came on deck next morning.

When one has charge of anything he can't know too soon what it is. I had charge of convicts, and I made it my first business to see them. We had a captain, an ensign, and sixty soldiers on board, and they had three hundred and eighty-seven convicts to look after.

I asked the captain—his name was Malet—to have the convicts mustered for inspection. The captain had been to India, so he naturally passed the order to the ensign. The ensign had not been to India, but he could profit by a good example. The ensign passed the word to the senior sergeant, and the sergeant mustered the convicts.

They were mustered in the “convict pen,” as it was called; that is, the part of the deck amidships that was fenced off to give the prisoners air and exercise. On the “Torres Vedras” it might give them air, when air happened to be plentiful; it certainly could not give them exercise. At first sight I confess I didn’t like it. At the very first glance I felt a suspicion of trouble.

The convicts were probably no worse than others, but they certainly were not attractive. As I walked slowly down the ranks and looked at them, I confess I thought badly of my charge. I had expected to see evidences of crime. What I mainly noticed were signs of brutality. The faces were not all in themselves bad, but nearly all looked stupid and brutal. Near the end I came upon two that were different—so different that I stopped to inspect them more closely.

The first was a young man, tall and powerfully built, with jet black hair and eyes of the same color. The eyes were very remarkable, and caught my attention at once. They looked at me, and yet I could have sworn they somehow didn’t see me. The other was nearly as young but of quite a different type, rather short and broad, with yellow hair and pleasant open blue eyes. I almost started to see such a face among a gang of convicts.

I touched the tall man on the arm to attract his attention, and said, “What is your name, my man?”

He looked at me vaguely and doubtfully for a second or two, then he replied, "Jenkins, sir, Jenkins." And then he muttered to himself in a low tone, "Yes, Jenkins; that's it."

I turned from him to his neighbor, I suppose, with a look of inquiry, for the man put his two forefingers to his forehead and shook his head.

"Ah," I said. "And yours?"

"Mayhew, sir, at home; I'm 322 here, and he's 321." He nodded towards his companion as he spoke.

"I see. And what brought you here, my man?"

"Along of poaching, sir."

"Poaching!" I exclaimed. "You don't say you are here for poaching?"

"No, sir, leastways they said not. You see there was a bit of a scrimmage, and Bill Hawkins, that's the gamekeeper, he ups and hits me with his gunstock on the shoulder. So I hits him over the head with my stick. Down Bill goes; I knowed he would, and sarve him right, too, for going for an old mate like that. Hows'ever they brings it in a murderous assault."

"Ah, I see; and Jenkins?"

Somehow I didn't like to ask the man himself: the strange look in his eyes seemed to hold me back.

"321, sir? Well, I don't rightly know about him. He don't seem to know himself; leastways he don't say; but they calls him the 'gentleman highwayman.'"

I looked at 321 again. Yes, so far at any rate they were right. Even in that place it was evident; even under these hideous clothes it could not be mistaken. Whatever he had done, whatever crime had brought him there, he had come from the position of a gentleman.

Mechanically I finished my inspection and let them go. I returned to my cabin and sat down to think. After all, there is no pursuit like philosophy, and no subject for philosophy like the subject of error. Wherever you may go, philosophy is an employment. Wherever you may find yourself, you cannot want for examples of error.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ship was overcrowded. That was the first error I noticed on board, and it was a serious one. We had two officers in the cabin, and sixty soldiers below. The officers, as a matter of course, had more than enough room, the soldiers rather less. In the forecastle we had in all twenty-nine sailors. Making allowance for the fact that sailors usually live like dogs on board ship and are in the open air three-fourths of their time, the dog-kennel they occupied might pass muster, if all went well. We started with three hundred and eighty-seven convicts, they were below amidships, and they had exactly the room and the air allowed for two hundred and fifty by the admiralty regulations, and for about one hundred and fifty according to nature.

There is philosophy in everything, and there is error in most things. I found out the philosophy of this business before I had been three days on board. I suspected the error a good deal sooner, but I didn't appreciate it fully till some time later. Experience is a great philosopher, and experience had taught the captain of the "Torres Vedras" how to make money out of convicts and how to bribe government inspectors. Ordinary goods cannot be much compressed without injury, but ordinary convicts may be squeezed just as much as human nature will bear. The government chartered the ship to carry convicts and stores, and the government paid the owners for doing this; but for all that she would carry after she was full, some-

body else would pay the captain. The name for this in English is "unprincipled greed"—that was the name I gave it to the skipper along with a piece of my mind generally. Its name in Philosophy is "irregular acquisitiveness." It has a chapter to itself in the third book of the "Philosophy of Error." That chapter was a great comfort to me at the time. Unfortunately, it was hardly so good for the convicts as more air would have been.

You can't take much personal interest in three hundred and eighty-seven strangers all at once. Even the fact that they are convicts doesn't make it very much easier. While they were below one could hardly see them in the half darkness, through the dense air which made one gasp and cough on first trying to breathe it. When they were in the place fenced off for them on deck they were an almost undistinguishable mass of wretched and savage-looking humanity. So far as I could see, there were only two exceptions—the tall convict with the black hair and the strange black eyes that looked at without noticing one, who answered to the name of Jenkins, and the short convict with the yellow hair and blue eyes who answered to the name of Mayhew. One must interest oneself in some one when in contact with a crowd. I interested myself in Jenkins and Mayhew.

I think I liked Mayhew best, but I was certainly most interested in Jenkins. I had ascertained that Mayhew had told me correctly what he was himself convicted for. I found out that he was only partly correct about his companion. "For highway robbery, with murder. Sentenced to death, commuted to transportation for life." This was the entry against 321 in the books. This was all that remained of the

history of John Jenkins. This was his fresh starting-point in life. A melancholy start, a heavy handicap.

Murder. I looked at him curiously as he leaned against the open fence of the palisades which stood, like his crime materialized, between him and humanity. His large eyes were fixed vacantly on the white-crested waves that rushed past the ship. There was intense melancholy expressed in his attitude and on his face. Murder—I repeated to myself—murder and robbery. No. I felt sure there was a mystery, a mistake. The “Philosophy of Error” was well advanced, but it hadn’t come near the point of accounting for the anomaly of that face set opposite to that sentence. Should I have to begin a new chapter on “Irreconcilable facts?”

“Doctor, don’t you think you had better see Miss Malcolm?” It was the would-be sprightly voice of Mrs. Malet’s maiden sister that interrupted my reverie. It was the sprightly fan of the same evergreen spinster which tapped me lightly on the arm. I confess I am not fond of sprightly spinsters. I had not at that time made up my mind whether to give them a chapter to themselves in the “Philosophy of Error.” Miss Tupper went far to decide me. She was so very sprightly; and she was such an unmistakable error.

“Miss Malcolm,” I replied, “who is she? I never heard of her before.”

“Oh, she’s a young lady passenger; quite one of ourselves, you know.” I looked at her. She had light hair, and washed-out blue eyes. A complexion with the color ingrained in delicate tracery on the cheeks, and the gentle crow’s feet of forty years’ growth at least at the corners of her eyes. I had no anxiety to be introduced to “one of ourselves.” Another illustra-

tion of error coming under the head of "Preconceptions," Chapter III., Book II.

Miss Malcolm shared one of the stern cabin state-rooms with Miss Tupper, but she shared little else with her. She really had the youth which Miss Tupper had parted with twenty years before, and she really possessed the good looks which Miss Tupper tried to believe she had, but had never had. There was no need to classify Miss Malcolm: she didn't come within the "Philosophy of Error" at all.

There was nothing seriously the matter with her, and she was soon about the deck, the one young, pretty, and cheerful soul on board the "Torres Vedras." Otherwise we were not an attractive party. The skipper was a greedy, close-fisted old Scotchman, as excellent as a seaman as he was disagreeable as a man. Captain Malet was an easy-going officer enough, caring for nothing but his comfort and his grog. His wife was Miss Tupper over again, only she was Miss Tupper half a dozen years younger, and likewise Miss Tupper with her destiny fulfilled, Miss Tupper successful in the acquisition of a husband, and Miss Tupper possessed of a son—a child some six years of age. There was not a great deal of choice. If Miss Malcolm had been far less attractive in herself than she was, she would still have attracted by contrast. If she had been much less interesting for her own sake, one must have found her interesting in self-defence.

Before we had been at sea a fortnight I had made up my mind to it. I was booked for four or five months of bad company; nobody worth observing in the cabin but a girl of eighteen going to join her father in Australia; nobody worth taking an interest in amidships but a poacher and a highwayman out of three

hundred and eighty-seven convicts. There was nothing for it but to teach the girl the "Philosophy of Error," and, as far as I could manage it, to lighten the misery of my highwayman and my poacher amidships.

I was in error again, as usual—under the heading "Hasty Anticipations," Chapter IV., Book II. The first thing that happened was an accident which nobody could have foreseen. The second was no accident, and I had foreseen it myself. It was on the twentieth day out that the accident happened. The weather was fine, but the breeze was strong and a heavy sea was running. The day had been very warm, and I had insisted on the prisoners being kept on deck as long as there was any daylight. The place fenced off for them on deck was too small for exercise, but even greed could not shut out air from it. What stupidity could do it had done. It was fenced off from the rest of the ship by a palisade about eight feet high—the lower two or three feet solid, the upper part open, so that it looked like the bars of a wild beast's cage. Nowhere did it reach to the bulwarks. It came to within about two feet of the side and then ran parallel with the bulwarks; and on each side was a platform about a foot or eighteen inches below the bulwarks to enable the sailors to get fore and aft the ship.

I was perhaps wrong in saying that Miss Malcolm was the only young and pretty creature on board. Mrs. Malet's little boy was both young and pretty as children go, but he was not cheerful. He was a quiet, solitary child, and the convicts seemed to weigh on his spirits. His one pleasure and his only occupation seemed to be watching them, and he might always be found in some place which commanded a view of the

"pen." That evening he was perched upon the bulwarks close to the main shrouds, his feet on the platform, his eyes fixed on the groups of convicts hanging about listless and sullen inside the enclosure. I fancy he was looking at Jenkins, in whom he seemed, like the rest of us, to take a special interest.

How it happened I don't know, but suddenly there was a sway of the ship, and as suddenly a shriek of terror, and the child was gone. I rushed to the side in time to see a broad hat and long, fair curls being swept past the ship on the crest of a wave. I looked, but I was helpless. I couldn't swim a stroke, and if I could it would have seemed too hopeless a task in the fading light and amongst these rushing waves. Suddenly I heard a scrambling sound behind me, followed instantly by a rush and a splash; and I was conscious that a dark body—the body of a man—had passed me and plunged headlong into the ocean. A wild confusion followed. Orders being shouted; sailors rushing to obey them; sails flapping with a report like artillery; and the ship shaking and quivering like a living creature in terror. Then passengers, soldiers, sailors, and even convicts, crowded to the side to watch. For myself, I had never taken my eyes off the sea. The heaving, rushing waves, that leaped and curled and broke, seemed to me for the moment to be living things. It was a struggle for life, the struggle of the few against the many, of the weak against the strong. My eyes seemed glued to the waves. I could see nothing but the place where I last saw the child, and the spot growing every moment dimmer and more distant, where the dark figure of his would-be rescuer breasted the billows.

The ship had stopped, shivered, come round to the

wind; her sails flapping, her cordage flying loose, and yet I followed that dark figure through it all. The waves rolled between us and I lost him; then they sank down and I saw him again. It seemed to be an age—it could have been only a minute or two.

At last. The sun had sunk below the horizon, yet still the strong bright glow in the western heaven turned to fire the white combs of the waves between it and the ship. And there, on the very crest of a huge, green roller, away to windward, we could see, lit up as with a halo—the dark head of the bold swimmer against the light of the western sky, and beside him the golden head of the child.

A shout went up from the ship—a shout in which were joined the voices of all the sorts and conditions of men on board the “Torres Vedras.” Soldiers, sailors, convicts, joined in that shout. It was the celebration of humanity. It was the pæan of man’s victory over nature.

Already a boat had been lowered, and we watched her through the dull, fading light, as she battled her way against the rushing waves. More and more the light faded from the face of the sea. Dimmer and more dim became the outlines of the boat when she mounted the crest of a wave and prepared to plunge into the shadow beyond. And so the light waned, and some of our confidence waned along with it. We waited; we could do nothing but wait. We strained our eyes over the wild moving waste of dull, gray waters; but, beyond the occasional flash of light from some breaking wave, we could see nothing.

There was a hail at last. It was the boat coming back. There were answering hails. There was a confusion of shouts, a rushing to and fro of men with

lanterns. At last, as the boat drew under our lee, came the answering shouts, "Aye, aye, sir, all saved."

Till that moment I never thought who it might be that had recklessly risked his life to save the child. One of the sailors, I concluded, and I did not know one of them from the other. As I stood on the steps of the poop, holding on by the rail and peering into the darkness of the moving waters, I felt a light touch on my arm and the question was suggested, "Who was it, doctor?"

"I don't know," I replied, still straining my eyes to see. "A brave man, at any rate, Miss Malcolm."

"Brave! yes, more than brave. Poor little Georgie!"

Her clear young voice quivered with the tremulousness of tears. The boat came alongside. In the darkness I could just make her out as she rose and fell with the sea.

"Send down a sling; the child's fainted," came up from below. "Aye, aye."

The sling was sent down. Then it was pulled up again. Slowly it rose to the level of the bulwarks. A hand from below guided it as it came, and a dozen hands were stretched eagerly to receive it. I stepped hastily forward to look at the child. As I did so a figure surmounted the bulwarks and emerged dark and dripping into the light of the lanterns. Captain Malet, who had sprung forward to take his boy, started back at the apparition and uttered an exclamation,—“A convict, by God!” I, too, started as he spoke, for there, with the same tall, graceful figure clothed in the convict's hideous uniform, the same melancholy face, and strange, far-away eyes, stood the man against whose name was registered the description, "highway robbery, with murder."

He stood there totally unconcerned, the only face without excitement. The captain hesitated. "Who are you?" he said, at last.

"Jenkins, sir, Jenkins. Number 321." Then, in a vague, wondering sort of whisper, he repeated, "Yes, Jenkins."

"How did you get out?"

"I really don't know, sir. It was necessary."

The captain hesitated again, and the instinct of discipline prevailed.

"Guard, put that man back again. And see that no more escape."

There was a murmur from the sailors as the soldier laid his hand on the dripping arm of the convict, and all eyes turned from the unconscious child to his apparently equally unmoved deliverer. I glanced at the captain's boy. "Carry him down stairs and strip him. I'll be there in a minute," I said, as I hastily followed Number 321. As I turned I almost stumbled against Miss Malcolm; as I did so I noticed that she, too, was looking after that dark figure—that she, too, was thinking of the mysterious convict.

CHAPTER VII.

THE soldier on guard had just opened the gate into the convict's enclosure. The soldier who grasped the arm of 321 was in the act of pushing him through it when I came up with them.

"Halt there," I said. Both soldier and convict paused.

"Turn him this way. Hold the lantern to his face."

The soldier turned him round with a rapid twist, and the guard held up his lantern. I looked him steadily in the face. His eye met mine, but with the same curiously distant look in it as before. It might have been fancy, it might have been my own excitement, but I thought there was something new there. I grasped the man's wrist for an instant, but the pulse was full and vigorous. A little fast, perhaps, but not more than his recent exertions might fully account for. Still I looked at him doubtfully.

"Are there any beds in the hospital?" I asked.

"No, sir, and the skipper has filled it with spare sails."

"Confound the skipper! If he doesn't clear it in the morning, I'll throw his spare sails overboard. Well, 321, take your wet clothes off and turn in at once."

I turned hastily away, and the gate clanged as it shut 321 into the convict pen.

In the saloon all was excitement. Mrs. Malet and her sister had both, fortunately, been below while the danger lasted, and the first they knew of the accident

was seeing the child carried into the cabin wet and unconscious. Mrs. Malet immediately went into real hysterics, and her sister into an excellent imitation. All women are actors by nature; spinsters who are spinsters indeed are usually accomplished actors before they reach forty. Nothing like practice, after all. If youth would only hold out, they would be more dangerous at that age than ever before.

I am not very sentimental, and the contrast between the people who had done nothing and the man who had done everything didn't tend to improve my temper. The child's case was the only real one, and I couldn't be troubled with humbug. I told the captain to take his wife somewhere else, give her air, and sprinkle her with cold water and plenty of it. To Miss Malcolm's question as to what she was to do with Miss Tupper, I only replied, "Let her alone. You have some sense, and I want you here." I spoke loudly, I dare say. In spite of her hysterics, Miss Tupper must have heard me. In spite of her idiotic tears and laughter, she had sense enough to feel offended. Thank Heaven for that! If the accident did nothing else, it offended Miss Tupper. If it had no other good result, it relieved me of Miss Tupper's evergreen attentions.

Under my directions, Miss Malcolm undressed Georgie, rubbed him well and put him to bed, better a great deal than his silly mother or his idiotic aunt could have done. The child soon got over the faint, which was caused by fright and exhaustion, and in another hour he fell asleep. Then I went back to 321.

After some delay I was admitted into the convict's enclosure, and, accompanied by a soldier with a lantern, descended to the lower deck. It was a warm night, and, although there was still a breeze on deck, little of

it penetrated through the narrow hatchway. Below the heat was stifling, and the air felt thick and clotted as I faced it coming down from the deck. The place was in total darkness, but not in silence. As I paused before going down there came up a dull muffled sound, heavy, inarticulate, threatening, the sound of whispers suppressed by misery, the hum of wretchedness, heavy with curses.

The soldier with the lantern went first, and I followed him. As the light showed itself, the muttering sank to a low growl. As we appeared, there was a movement of curiosity and a momentary hush of other sounds. I never was in a wild beast's den. Indeed, except in the one recorded case of Daniel, I am under the impression that all such visits come strictly within the scope of the "Philosophy of Error;" but I don't think any wild beast's den could be so horrible as this place was.

I had seen it by day when the sunlight streamed through the open hatchway, and even then it was bad enough. Even then it was but a confusion of dens—a wilderness of lairs in which foul humanity might crouch out of sight. But at night! The close, foul atmosphere, swimming and sweltering visibly in the dim yellow light of the lantern—the foulness and squalor which were partly visible, multiplied a hundred-fold to the imagination by the abyss of darkness which met the eyes and the low mutterings which reached the ears—this was horrible.

We threaded our way among the bunks—shelves built on shelves from the deck below to the deck above. Every bunk a den; every den tenanted by an inhuman specimen of humanity, with eyes that glared out upon us foul and threatening, as we slowly made our way

towards the end where my guide told me I should find 321.

He was there. Stretched flat upon his back, still dressed in the clothes he had worn, he lay steaming and apparently asleep on the narrow shelf before me. I started. I had ordered him to undress, and as I looked I saw the absurdity of my order. At any rate he had not obeyed it. He was asleep. His long black eyelashes fell darkly on his cheek. His arm was thrown across his broad chest, and the long fingers of his hand moved restlessly as he lay. I put my hand on his arm. "Jenkins," I said, "Jenkins!" His eyes opened suddenly and looked at me.

"Who calls me? Jenkins, Jenkins. Yes, Jenkins is my name now. Yes, he was condemned and executed, too, and not a soul knows it. Oh, it was rare, rare! Yes, sir, yes, Jenkins; that's my name, sir." And his voice sank into a strange whisper as he spoke, while his eyes seemed to look over me and beyond at something far away.

I bent over him; I touched his wrist lightly with my fingers. I laid my hand softly on his brow. He took no notice. He was whispering rapidly to himself, in a hollow muttering whisper, and he had evidently no knowledge of my presence.

"Good God!" I exclaimed, involuntarily, as I drew back. I glanced round me. In the darkness on every side of me I could make out heads, more or less distinct, peering through the shadows at me, and close beside me was my guide. "What is it, sir?" he whispered.

"Nothing, nothing," I replied, hastily; "but we can be of no use to him to-night. Let him sleep. Sleep is the best thing for him."

Slowly we retraced our steps. Slowly we emerged

into the fresh air above. We paused to draw a long breath when we reached the deck once more.

"Bad air that, sir," said my companion, as we waited for the guard to unlock the gate.

"Yes," I said. "Come with me and I'll get you a glass of grog." I went aft, to the wheel, where I knew I should find the skipper. He was there, leaning against the side, looking up at the sails. I put my hand on his arm quietly, and, as he turned hastily, I said,—

"Have the hospital cleared at daylight, captain."

"What for?" he asked, in a surly tone.

"For fever," I replied.

He stared at me. I could see his eyes in the starlight, and they looked large and startled.

"Fever! Good heavens, doctor!"

"Nothing of the sort, skipper. Bad air, and not nearly enough of that."

I was sure of it, and I was right. It was the fever. How could it be otherwise?

The hospital was cleared by daybreak in the morning, and 321 was removed there at once. I had no doubt of his fever overnight; I need hardly say I had none in the morning. He was delirious, and never for a moment ceased talking, in the low muttering tone which I regarded as a bad symptom. He had not been left long among the others, and his fever had only just set in. In any other circumstances, I should have been hopeful of stamping it out. In any other place I should not have expected it to spread. In our case I had no such hope. Our circumstances were fever circumstances; our place was a hot-bed for disease. I was right.

No. 321 was removed to the hospital at daybreak, in

the morning, and before evening we had three others there.

By the afternoon of the second day we had twelve cases, and the hospital was full to overflowing. I held a conference on deck with Captain Malet, the ensign, and the skipper, and I told them the plain truth,—the extra cargo must go overboard. The skipper was furious at the bare idea.

“What? Throw over the cargo? Not while I command this ship,” he exclaimed.

I turned to Captain Malet. “In that case, captain, you had better prepare for the worst.”

“The worst, doctor? What do you mean?”

“This: in a week this will be a plague ship. In a fortnight what few of us are left will try to reach the nearest port. Very likely we shall not be able.”

“Great heavens, doctor! You don’t mean that?”

“I do, Captain Malet, and, as I have work to do as long as I survive to do it, I must wish you good-evening.”

“Stay a moment, doctor. Are you really serious?”

“As serious as a man should be when he stands among nearly five hundred of his fellow-creatures, the only one who knows that he and they stand at the mouth of hell.”

“How many have you down now?” asked Captain Malet, irresolutely, after a moment’s pause.

“Twelve to-night, and the hospital is overcrowded. At least twenty-four to-morrow, and no place to put them. If that happens in the black hole the skipper has left us, I wouldn’t give a farthing for your chance or mine.”

Without another word, I turned and left them where they stood. I plunged into that reeking under-world of misery and disease.

What passed I don't know. I only know that my words took effect. By ten next morning I had secured air and room at the expense of the skipper's extra freight.

It was time. The fever spread like wildfire, and raged like a furnace. I made one great hospital of the space I had secured, and in a week I had more than a hundred fever patients. I have seen fever in camp and garrison; in the field where men fell and rotted like sheep, and in hospitals where the patients coming in jostled the dead going out for possession of a place in which to die. I have seen all these things, but the horror was as nothing compared with the next six weeks aboard the "Torres Vedras." Men sickened every hour, and we could scarcely give them water, not to speak of medicine. Men dropped and died, and we scarcely noted their numbers, and never inquired their names as we hurried them to the gangway and consigned them to the deep.

The tropical sun poured down upon us like molten gold, and for days we lay becalmed, a groaning mass of suffering mortality. It is fifteen years ago now, yet still I look back upon it as the nightmare of my life. Two figures stand out against that lurid background of misery; two human beings vindicated humanity in that awful extremity. Mayhew the convict was one, Miss Malcolm, the delicate English girl, was the other. From the first Mayhew begged to be allowed to nurse his comrade, and having once begun he went on to nurse the rest. It was days before I would listen to Miss Malcolm's entreaties to be allowed to help, but sheer necessity at last compelled me. When my soldier assistants sickened and fell ill, I gave way.

I had thought to take an interest in this girl for

want of any one else. I had dreamed of teaching her the "Philosophy of Error," for want of any more intelligent listener. Instead of this she compelled my admiration. Instead of my teaching her she taught me something that was almost better than the "Philosophy of Error."

One error she cured me of forever. I learned in that chamber of horrors that the better instincts of human nature are never wholly dead. I learned that men, however degraded, have in them at bottom something manly still. So it was with our convicts. From the day when Miss Malcolm came into the hospital till the day when I forbade her to come again, no man in possession of his senses uttered one word in her presence she need have been ashamed to hear.

Slowly the days followed one another in a procession so weird and strange that they looked then, and they look still, like the days of a dream. At last we glided out of the tropics into the region of rolling waves and life-giving breezes once more. At last the day came when there were no new cases. At last the time arrived when I could hope that we had heard the last deadly plunge from the gangway.

Then I forbade Miss Malcolm the hospital; I assured her that her self-imposed task had been nobly done. She looked round the dismal place, into which, however, both sun and air found their way now in abundance, and the tears stood in her large grey eyes. "Good-by, men," she said, in her clear, soft voice. "I hope soon to see you all on deck again."

"Good-by, miss, good-by," came back eagerly from fifty bed-places; and from Mayhew, who sat beside the bed-place where 321 still lay, a hearty "God bless ye." Was I wrong in fancying that her eyes lingered longest

on that distant corner by the port-hole? Was I mistaken in thinking that the mystery of that silent patient, coming back so reluctantly from the grave, had got hold of Miss Malcolm, too? I may have been; at least she said nothing. Silently she left the hospital, and accompanied me on deck.

The last man to recover was 321. Very slowly he came back from the grave. Slowly, fitfully, lingeringly, he gathered strength once more. Yet in the end he did. I kept him in the hospital long after every other patient had left it. He shrank from going on deck, and I humored his wish. Somehow I looked for a change in this man as the result of the fever. I felt disappointed when no change was visible. Morning after morning I looked into his eyes in hopes of seeing it, and was disappointed.

On the day that we sighted land he came on deck into the convict's pen once more. I stood and watched him as he gazed out over the sea in his listless fashion. Then I saw him start, and, turning to his companion, ask a question. At the answer he hastily raised his hand to his head, looked wildly round him, then staggered and fell on the deck.

CHAPTER VIII.

I HAD him carried back to the hospital and laid upon his bed. The man was still weak, and the faint was a long one. We stayed with him and did what we could to bring him round. Mayhew, the hospital guard, and myself were with him when he came to himself, and we were the only ones. He must have been a man of extraordinary nervous energy. Before he was fully conscious he was on his guard; before he could possibly have grasped the circumstances by which he was surrounded he had again grasped the remembrance of his secret. Whatever that secret might be, it was safe with him. Whatever it was that he desired to conceal was to remain a secret still.

Gradually he recovered consciousness, and opened his eyes. I had watched eagerly for this, both as a doctor and as a philosopher, and both as a doctor and as a philosopher I was gratified. As I had expected, he did not recognize me. As I had fully anticipated, the expression of his eyes had changed. Whoever he was, the recent scenes of his life had been wiped out of his memory. Whoever he had been, the past life which had been lost to him was now restored.

He looked at me, but said nothing. Mayhew looked anxiously at him and then at me. I felt that if I wished to learn anything I must begin. If I hoped to gain any information about 321, my only chance was to obtain it now.

"Do you feel better?" I asked, laying my fingers on his wrist.

"Pardon me." His voice was clear and firm; it had the unmistakable tone of the voice of a gentleman. "Have I been long unwell?"

"At present only a few minutes. You were looking at the land. The sunlight on the water must have affected you. You have but just recovered from a long illness."

"Thank you," he replied, and remained silent. Yet his eyes did not rest for an instant. With quick secret glances he was looking at the place, the furniture, Mayhew, and myself, with the slightly puzzled look of a man who has forgotten, but thinks he ought to remember.

"Have you forgotten your illness?" I asked, after a pause.

"Quite, sir, quite."

"What is the last thing you can remember clearly?"

I thought he was about to answer me. I leaned forward involuntarily to catch the expression of his face, and I could see Mayhew and the soldier from behind him looking and listening also.

For an instant he paused. The muscles of his face never moved, but one sharp gleam of pain passed over his eyes for a single second before he replied.

"Pardon me, sir; the recollection is a painful one."

He stopped at that. Looking at him I felt sure that at that point he would continue to stop. For the moment I felt annoyed. I forgot that I was a philosopher writing the "Philosophy of Error." I gave a sample of the error, and forgot to give an illustration of the philosophy.

"Well, sir, of course your secret is your own, and I

have no desire to intrude." I may remark that this was an error. I had a very strong desire to intrude. The explanation will be found in Chapter IX., Book I. of the "Philosophy of Error." Whoever wastes his time in reading this will do well to improve his mind by reading that, as soon as it is published. "In the mean time," I continued, "as you may be somewhat at a loss, let me tell you that you are on board the ship 'Torres Vedras,' off the coast of Australia, and that, I regret to say, you are at present a prisoner on board."

As I spoke, he looked quietly and inquiringly in my face. As I concluded, he spoke again.

"Thank you, sir, for the information. Could you increase the obligation by mentioning the name by which I am known on board as a prisoner?"

"Number 321," I replied.

"Only that?"

"Only that. In the books you have the additional name of John Jenkins, I believe."

As I spoke, a look of relief passed over his face; the anxiety which had shown itself in his tone passed out of his voice.

"Thank you," he said. "Jenkins. Yes, I remember."

That was all. Number 321 had learned all he was anxious to know, and he was evidently not inclined to be communicative about himself.

As a philosopher I felt that my curiosity, however friendly, was hardly dignified. As a doctor I felt that I must let my patient alone. I left the hospital, the soldier standing at ease at the door, Mayhew sitting on an empty bunk, staring curiously at his comrade.

On deck I met Miss Malcolm.

"Was that poor 321 who fainted on deck just now, doctor?" she asked, in that soft, clear voice which as a

doctor I had learnt to appreciate and as a philosopher had learnt to like. Had I been twenty years younger, I might have had views about it also as a man; but that is beside the question, and really concerns nobody.

"Yes, my dear, but he's all right again now."

She looked at me as if she would like to ask more; then she checked herself, and turned away with the remark, "It is something, doctor, to have brought the rest of us here in safety."

In the saloon the captain was lazily smoking his hookah and sipping his claret by turns, as he lay back in the Indian straw chair which played an important part in his domestic economy. "Land at last, doctor," he observed, as I entered. "You've had a pretty tough job of it this time. I congratulate you on your success."

"Thank you, captain," I replied. "I hope you'll see your way to do something for my last patient."

"Last patient, eh? Whom do you mean?" The captain removed the mouth-piece of his pipe, in his surprise.

"Number 321, you know—the man that went overboard after your boy."

"Three-twenty-one? Ah, to be sure. And the poor beggar has pulled through, after all? Well, you surprise me!" And Captain Malet replaced his mouth-piece, and took several meditative whiffs at the hookah without speaking.

"Yes," I said, after waiting in vain for something more. "Yes, he's pulled through. Don't you think you could do something for him?"

"Dammed if I know," he said, at last. "You see, doctor, it was confoundedly irregular, and all that sort of thing, you know. Of course, under the circum-

stances, I overlooked it. But, don't you see, one mustn't go too far with that sort of fellow. Bad character, too. Here for murder and robbery: why on earth they didn't hang him I don't know. Chain gang and all that sort of thing when he gets ashore, I expect."

"Well, at least you could get him off that, captain," I exclaimed, shocked and startled at the idea of such a degradation for the man I had just left. "You owe him as much as that, at least."

"Ah, you think so, do you, doctor? Well, come to look at it, perhaps you're right. After all, you see, he did save the child, and it was a deuced plucky thing to do. Yes, I think I might manage that—and you think it would be the correct thing to do under the circumstances?"

"Certainly, Captain Malet; I feel sure it wouldn't look well if you did nothing at all for the man."

"All right, doctor. Do you know, I'm rather glad you happened to mention it. Poor devil! It *was* a plucky thing to do, you know, after all. Yes, I won't forget."

It was another week before we reached Sydney Harbor, and in the mean time, to my surprise, my last patient got out of my hands. He evidently did not want to stay in the hospital. He manifestly preferred to go back to his place with the others.

I made no further attempt to surprise his secret. At our last interview I noticed that once more the expression of his eyes had altered. The vague far-away look which on his first recovery had given way to one of surprise and curiosity had been replaced by one of concentration and secrecy, almost fierce in its intensity. That the man had a secret I felt more sure than ever.

That it would remain a secret I felt certain, even to the very end.

At last we cast anchor in Port Jackson, and my work was done. I gave my report to the proper officer, who came on board to get it; and I said good-by to my fellow-passengers. As I shook hands with Captain Malet, he said, "I've not forgotten your murderer. I hope he won't repeat any of his old performances here, or the authorities won't thank me."

I glanced at the convicts who were being paraded to go on shore. The last figure on which my eyes rested was the tall figure of Number 321. The last farewell I heard as I sat in the boat came down to me in the pleasant voice of Miss Malcolm, as she leaned over to wave her handkerchief to me as I left the ship's side.

CHAPTER IX.

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER OF MISS MALCOLM'S TO A FRIEND IN ENGLAND.

WE had the strangest, the most terrible voyage in the "Torres Vedras." At first I thought it was going to be nice—all but the poor convicts, of course. You never saw anything like the way they are treated, and it is quite dreadful to see their sad, dreary faces, looking as if they had nothing to live for. At first I thought I would keep myself from thinking about them, because you know I could do nothing for them, and of course most of them are sure to have been very wicked. I dare say I might have almost forgotten them, too, if we had had nice companions in the cabin. People say I must have been unfortunate, and perhaps it was partly my own fault; but at any rate the passengers didn't interest me much. You saw Captain and Mrs. Malet and little Georgie before we left, so I needn't describe them; but I don't think you saw Miss Tupper. Well, she was worse, ever so much worse than Mrs. Malet. She is ever so old, older than Mrs. Malet, a great deal, and she wants to look young. Then she reads poetry and repeats it at night, you know, on deck—that sort of a person, and not good looking in the very least. Of course she was very tiresome. Then Mr. Lawson—he was the ensign, and hadn't been one very long. He used to say, "Ah, do you know?" whenever he began to say anything, and, "Really now.

Indeed, you don't say so," whenever one ventured to make a remark; the sort of young man who ought to lisp, only this one didn't, which was somehow aggravating. The ship's captain—they always call him "skipper;" I wonder why—was an old Scotchman, very surly and disagreeable, who always said "ma'am" at the end of his sentences, and looked as if he found ladies very much in his way. Oh, but there was the doctor. He was my one bright spot—the dearest, funniest old absurdity you ever saw. He was such fun at first. He had been surgeon to the Forty-seventh all through the Peninsula, and now he is writing a book. It is about the "Philosophy of Error," and he quite believes that when it is written (I don't believe it ever will be, you know, for he gets at least one new idea for it every day) it will somehow do away with mistakes and crimes and wrong things altogether. He used to tell me about it, and sometimes read me bits out of it. Such funny things, but sometimes very curious and clever, too. I think I could have got on pretty well with my books and Georgie, and the "Philosophy of Error," if the doctor hadn't spoiled me for it. He would talk about the convicts, and tell one all sorts of dreadful things about the horrible place they had to live in below. Some of them are there for quite little things, too. One man he pointed out to me (you know we could see them when we were on deck, for they had a place near the middle of the ship, fenced in with bars, just like a wild beast's cage without a roof) who was only a poacher and had fought with the game-keeper. The game-keeper struck him with a gun and the man struck him with a stick and knocked him down, but didn't do him much harm, and yet he was sent away among

all sorts of dreadful people and was treated worse than a wild beast.

The doctor was always talking to Captain Malet about the place into which they had squeezed these convicts, and saying we should have some dreadful disease in the ship. The captain would only laugh, and smoke his long pipe; but my doctor was right, and we had, oh! such a dreadful time, after all.

First little Georgie fell overboard just before dark one night. It was not exactly stormy, but great waves were rushing and heaving past the ship at the time. You would never have believed that any one could have floated for a minute among them. The poor little fellow gave one great scream as he fell. My heart seemed to stand still. I was standing on the ladder leading up to the poop deck, holding on tightly by the brass railing to keep myself from falling, and looking at the waves dashing past the ship, when it happened, so I saw it all quite distinctly. I think I must have screamed quite as loudly as Georgie did, I was so terrified and so helpless. Then in a moment I saw one of the convicts scramble up to the top of the fence I told you about, and then spring headlong, just as you might fancy a lion springing into the tossing waves. You can't fancy what it was like. There was poor Georgie being swept away behind the ship, only his little petticoats and things keeping him afloat, and there was the brave convict battling against the great green waves that rushed at him as if they meant to swallow him up in a moment. Everybody rushed to the side to look at him, and the sailors loosed all the ropes and things that hold the sails and the yards, and the ship came round as if to go after him. It grows dark so fast there that we soon lost sight of them

both, only we saw the convict reach him and get him in his arms, and then it all grew mixed and we could see nothing but tossing waves, sometimes green and sometimes white, and could only fancy that now and then we caught glimpses of their heads among them. A boat was let down and rowed away, but they had to row against the waves. It was ever so long before they reached them, and it was quite dark before they got back. When they got Georgie on board he had fainted, and the man that saved him came on deck at the same time, dripping with water and looking so dark and strange in the light of the lanterns. He was tall and very strong-looking. I don't think I ever saw a stronger-looking man, and he had very black hair, which hung all wet over his face, and the very strangest fiery black eyes you ever saw. He didn't seem to take any notice of anything; even when Captain Malet spoke to him quite harshly, and asked who he was, he didn't seem to mind in the least or to think it strange, when he had just saved his boy.

I could never like Captain Malet again, though. Just fancy him ordering a soldier to take him away and lock him up, just as if he had been a dangerous dog got loose, when he had done a thing that not a single one of all these sailors and soldiers was brave enough to do. I know the doctor was angry, too, for he spoke quite roughly, telling us to get Georgie undressed, and then he went after the convict. I should so much have liked to go, too, just to show the poor creature that we could admire a great deed, even if he was a convict; but of course I couldn't do that.

By and by the doctor came back, and I could see that he was anxious, for he was very cross. Mrs. Malet had gone into hysterics, poor thing, when they

took Georgie into the saloon, and he actually told the captain to take her away and throw water over her, and plenty of it, and she had on a really lovely silk at the time. Of course Miss Tupper was absurd to go into hysterics, too; but he offended the poor creature very much by the contemptuous way he spoke of her. We got Georgie to bed, however, and he was as well as ever the next day. But that night the man who saved him took ill of fever. The doctor says the fever was there before, and the excitement and exertion only brought it out more quickly, but at any rate it was very dreadful.

That old wretch the ship's captain had actually stolen most of the room that was meant for the convicts, and they were almost choked by the bad air. The moment the fever began, it spread among them just like the stories one has heard of the plague. Ever so much of the cargo had to be thrown overboard, for it was our only chance of stopping the fever. I suppose it did stop it at last, but at one time I thought every one on board would have died; but for the doctor I am sure they would. More than a hundred of the convicts did die and were thrown overboard, as well as ten of the soldiers, and some sailors as well.

After the first week, I got leave from the doctor to help. You know I always said it was woman's work to nurse, and the doctor was getting quite worn out. The soldiers he had to help him kept getting fever themselves, and it was much better to do what one could than that we should all die. I used to see the military hospital at Colchester, when papa commanded there, but I never saw anything the least like this. There were more than a hundred beds—well, you couldn't call them beds, they were only rough shelves

put up by the carpenter in rows, with just room to get about between them. How the poor creatures lived at all I can hardly fancy; but a good many of them did recover in the end.

That poacher was a splendid fellow. You never saw a man work as he did. Day and night, week after week, he was going from bed to bed, giving the poor creatures drink or medicines. Sometimes they raved fearfully, and had to be held or even tied down, and then it was awful to hear them. The poacher's real name was Mayhew, and he was called 322 because that was his convict number on board. You can hardly fancy what a nice fellow he was, in spite of his awful convict clothes, and he was there for the sake of his comrade, the man who saved Georgie. He was 321, and he was terribly ill. I know there was some strange mystery about that man, and I feel sure the doctor thought so, too. But through all his fever he never told anything, even when he was most wildly delirious. He would sometimes call out "George, George," in *such* a tone, it was enough to break your heart; and then he would mutter "Jenkins, Jenkins. Yes, Jenkins is the name." But he never said one word about his own past life. It was so strange to see his wild black eyes shining out of his gaunt face like stars, and his comrade always trying to soothe him. He did recover at last, but it was all owing, the doctor said, to 322 that he ever got better.

We got here at last. You can have no idea how lovely it seemed after that terrible time. I don't know what the poor prisoners thought of it, for of course they had only come out for punishment, but it was like fairyland to me. The sky was so blue, and the water was exactly the same color, only a shade darker.

The sun here seems ever so much brighter than it is in England; and the whole air is filled with the scent of the wild flowers and shrubs that cover all the little hills and points round the harbor.

When we got in, papa hadn't arrived; but an officer came off in about an hour to invite me to stay at Government House till he came. Of course, I was delighted to go, for I was wild to go on shore. I had been looking at Government House, standing among the trees, the very loveliest spot you can imagine. The doctor went ashore first, with some military friend who had brought a boat off when we first came in, and by the time I was ready the prisoners were being got ready to go ashore.

Do you know, I felt quite sorry to leave the poor creatures. I could see quite a number of those I had helped to nurse, and they had always been so nice and grateful to me. Poor fellows, as I passed them quite a number pulled off their caps and gave a kind of cheer. I could have cried, then, do you know. I don't think I ever, in all my life, heard anything so sad as that cheer.

I passed quite close to where Mayhew was standing beside No. 321. Mayhew had his cap off and was cheering; the other stood quite still, with his arms folded, looking at me with the strangest face. I don't think he knew me at all, and yet, somehow, his face looked as if he thought he ought to, and was trying hard to remember. It was really a terrible face, but so strange and strong and grand. The doctor told me long before that he had been condemned to be executed for highway robbery and murder, and that he had only been reprieved afterwards. I don't believe he did it. He might have killed some one, perhaps,

for some very great reason, but I can't believe he ever robbed any one. His face wasn't in the very least like that.

It was delightful at Government House. They were all as kind to me as could be, and if one had not known otherwise, and if the sky and the air and the water and everything had not somehow looked different and new, one might have fancied oneself in an English country-house again. Two days after we arrived our doctor came to call on the governor, and he told me a great deal about our prisoners. Poor fellows, they were all, except a few of the worst criminals, to be distributed, in a week or two, among the settlers for servants. He says he hears that sometimes they are almost starved, and very cruelly treated. I determined then that I would see whether papa couldn't have Mayhew and his friend given to him for servants. I am sure they wouldn't be starved and ill-treated at his place.

Next day papa came. Do you know, he looks a great deal older, and ever so much more severe than he used to do when you knew him. I was so sorry. I wonder whether having convict servants to look after makes people look like that? It had such an effect upon me, do you know, that I was positively almost afraid to ask him about Mayhew and the other. However, that seemed foolish, so I did it at last. He meant to be everything that was kind to me, I am certain, but he was quite annoyed when I told him about my helping to nurse the convicts. He seemed to think the doctor and Captain Malet and every one greatly to blame to have allowed it, but of course he couldn't know one bit what it was like.

At last he said he wanted some more hands, and he

would see about it. Then he looked at me for a moment and said,—“ But remember, Kate, convicts are convicts here. They come here to be punished, not to be coddled.” I only said, “ Yes, papa ;” but I felt almost sorry that I had asked him to take them at all.

CHAPTER X.

CHARLES FORTESCUE'S STORY. (CONTINUED.)

I AWOKE suddenly to recollection of the past at the sight of the flashing ocean and the distant land. The one word "Australia," spoken by the man at my side, came to me like an echo of the great prison clock striking four, and all that may have happened to me between the two impressions was swept from my memory as though it had never been.

As the word was spoken the grey blue cloud on the horizon and the blazing sunlight laughing on the summer sea joined themselves by some strange mental process to the sullen background of the condemned cell at Newgate, and seemed to complete the picture. In my last conscious moments I had seen the shadow of death approaching in the midst of life; I awoke again only to find that it had reached me, though in a form different from that I had expected.

They say I fainted; I suppose it is true, for when I awoke again I lay on a wretched bed between decks and the first sound of which I was conscious was the rush and ripple of parting waters coming through the open port at my side.

The faces I saw and the voices I heard were new, yet not unfamiliar to me. Like the faces one has seen in dreams, they haunted me with a half recollection. Like the sounds one has heard in sleep, they were at once strange and familiar to my ear.

What would it be to awake in hell? To know the shipwreck of all hope: the end of all desire; the destruction of the past, all but the pains of memory; the death of the future, all but the agony of its continuance! To few mortals can it be given to experience this. I was one of these. In all but its perpetuity this was hell. To feel the past as I felt it then, to gaze on the future as I then gazed upon it, this was hell. Let no one congratulate himself that there is no hell more material than this. This is enough. Yet I lived on. It would not have been difficult to commit suicide, yet, somehow, I never thought of it. My body, I was told, had just recovered from an illness, and I felt the sense of recovered vigor and renewed life in my veins and sinews. It gave me no sensible pleasure, yet who can say that it did not go far to counteract the dull heavy agony of emptiness that oppressed my mind?

Among the faces that came back to me with a haunting sense of recognition was one which I saw the day I left the ship. We were ordered to muster to go ashore. Mechanically I obeyed the order, which had no interest for me, and hardly awoke any idea in my mind. As we stood on deck I was startled by a movement of my companions, followed by something certainly meant for a cheer from our ranks. It was strange, hoarse, and unnatural, but it was intended for a cheer, and the idea was startling, for what could convicts find to cheer about? I looked up hastily to see, and met that face. I had seen it before—in dreams, it might be, but I had seen it.

It was the face of a girl—a face that would have been called singularly handsome, if it had not been beautiful; a face which must have been admired for its perfection of shape and color, if it had not been

worshipped for its expression. When I looked up, her eyes met mine. They were large, dark, luminous, and they were full of tears. I looked, and I almost staggered. It was a face out of the past life which was dead, and it was glorified by tears of sympathy and pity, which seemed to belong to the life to come.

Having once seen her, I could not withdraw my eyes. I watched her eagerly and hungrily as she passed us by; I gazed after her wonderingly when she had left the ship. Her face was not to me like the face of a woman. The tall, graceful figure seemed to me like that of some visitor from a better world.

In every great emotion there is something of a revelation. But a minute before I had felt as though I were in hell, and already everything was changed. Hell is but a conception of evil, stereoypted and unchangeable. When pity and sympathy find an entrance, the worst of hell, nay, hell itself, has ceased to exist. Vaguely, in my despair, I had dreamed that some change might come to me when the torture of life was ended. The sight of that face, full of sympathy, and those tears, full of pity, had already lightened my despair, and made hope even on earth seem a possible thing. I had seen it but for a few moments, but there is no time-limit to feeling. I was degraded still, but no longer utterly hopeless. I was still an outcast, but no longer utterly forsaken.

It was but one glimpse, but there are times in a life-history when a glimpse may be salvation. For the time it was so to me. Shut out, as I was, by a fate at once dark and mysterious, from my kind, I felt from that moment that it was possible I might not be shut out forever. In the company of the other prisoners, most of them the mere offscourings of humanity, I

could now think of something that was not degrading. In the wretchedness of the prison and the darkness of the cell I could think of the past without utter despair, and could even dream strange dreams of hope for the future, rendered conceivable by the vision of that face and the memory of those tears of sympathy.

I cannot say I remember how we were employed when we first landed. I know we were marched out to work in the morning, and I remember that we were locked up again at night. The work must have been hard, for I know I was weary, and slept well at night, but the incidents of the time passed me by unheeded, for the most part. My body grew strong—stronger, I think, than ever before,—and mere toil did not hurt me in the least. It was the degradation, the sense of shame and of slavery that seemed to eat into my soul like fetters; and but for that one ray of light it would have made me desperate.

The days followed one another monotonously, and I kept no record of time. What, indeed, was time to me? Intensity, they say, is the equivalent of duration; and, if this be true, I lived for years in that prison. At last a change came.

We were mustered one morning in the yard, and, instead of being marched out, we were kept standing there. Living, as I now did generally, in a life made up of dreamy recollections of the past, and still more dreamy visions of an all but impossible future, it scarcely aroused my attention. Presently, however, I noticed that we were undergoing inspection by a number of people, some of them, apparently, gentlemen, and others quite the reverse. Then I remembered having heard that we should be sent out to service with the settlers, and I looked with greater curiosity at the men who

were examining us with all the care of buyers in a slave-market.

They walked along our ranks, picking out the men whose appearance pleased them most, asking questions of the warders in attendance as to the crimes of the prisoners and their conduct in prison. I found myself listening with a sense of amusement, thinking how little they knew of the real character of the men to whom they gave good recommendations, and who were, as a rule, the worst and most accomplished scoundrels. I almost started when one man at last stopped in front of me. I looked steadily in his face, and he did the same to me for an instant. He was an elderly man and a gentleman; so much was evident at a glance. He was also, I judged, a military man, from his figure and carriage, though his dress bore no signs of it. He was a handsome man, not greatly short of sixty years of age, with grey hair and keen bluish-grey eyes, which looked at me as if they would fain look through me. His face was stern and cold, but it was the face of a gentleman, and at the first glance I was disposed to like it. It seemed to me I must somewhere have seen a face like it before, but I could not remember where it was or to whom it belonged.

He carried a riding-whip in his hand, and as he spoke he touched me lightly with it on the arm. The touch was offensive.

“And this fellow, warder; what’s he in for?”

“Highway robbery and murder, colonel; a reprieved criminal, sir.”

“Ah,” he said; and the colonel looked at me with some interest. “Highway robbery and murder, eh, and not hanged? What’s your name, fellow?” He looked at me sternly; he spoke in a stern, peremptory tone of voice.

As he spoke, the liking I had conceived for him at first sight ebbed quickly away, and I was conscious of a feeling of dislike and antagonism taking its place. The habit of obedience had now been formed, however, and, although I felt the blood surge upward to my face as he spoke, I answered, quietly,—

“Three hundred and twenty-one, sir.”

“Three hundred and twenty-one? Nonsense, sir, I asked your name. I suppose you had one, once. We know nothing of numbers in the bush. What is your name? or your last alias will do as well.”

What was it in the old man's tone that fell on my nerves like the stroke of a whip? I cannot tell, but I know that so it was. Already, in these few seconds my mouth had grown parched and my throat dry. My brain felt hot and burning as I met his cold, contemptuous eye, and my hands tingled with a sensation of longing that was almost tiger-like. I mastered my voice by an effort and replied,—

“Jenkins is my name, sir.”

“Jenkins. Ah, yes; I thought so. Well, Jenkins, look here. I don't like your looks in the least, but I have a reason for taking you, and I will do it. Don't make any mistake about it, though. I can see from your appearance that this position is new to you, and I wish to start fair. You may have been a gentleman once; with that I have nothing to do; you are a convict now, and I have everything to do with that. You will be treated like the other convicts by me—neither better because you were once a gentleman, nor worse because you have been a disgrace to the name. Do fair work and you will get fair treatment. Behave well, and you will be treated well. If not,” he added, looking straight into my eyes as he spoke, “if not, take care of yourself.”

He turned sharply round and left me as he spoke, and I remained looking after him, stupidly, I dare say, for at the moment I felt stupefied, perhaps from the force I put upon myself, but with a feeling at my heart better suited to the man I was supposed to be than to the man I had really been until that moment.

He stopped again before Tom and asked his name. Tom gave his own name pleasantly enough, and, I dare say, he would have taken him, too, but the warder said, "This man was selected by Mr. Turner, of Kowalla Station, colonel, a little while ago."

"Ah," he said, turning away; "selected by Turner, eh? He isn't in luck, then. He'd have been better off with me." Better off with him! I looked after him as he walked out of the yard, and I confess I thought it hardly likely. Tom shrugged his shoulders and looked after him, too. Then he ventured to say, in a low tone,

"Better off with him! Well, I dunno about that. If it's a fact, it don't look very rosy for Turner's place, I'm thinking."

I thought the same, and I was sorry, besides, that Tom and I were to be separated. It is true I had only known him, consciously, at any rate, for a few weeks, but I had learned to look on him as something like a friend even in that short time, although in many ways we had not much in common.

Two days more and I saw the last of prison life. I started with the colonel's team and his servants for the station. It was like beginning a new life to leave behind the little town and the wretched prison, to smell the fresh smell of the country, and to feel a sense of liberty once more, even although I knew I was still enslaved.

CHAPTER XI.

THE colonel's station was in the new country, and his dray and team had come down for stores. Two days later I was marched out of prison and handed over—with three others whom he had selected—to my new master. The colonel had not impressed me favorably the first time I saw him; he didn't improve matters on this second occasion. He was accompanied by the man in charge of the dray, a raw-boned, hard-featured man from the north of Ireland, and he handed us over to him.

The colonel was a man of few words, and he said but little now.

"These are the new hands, Fergusson. You'll see them safe to the station."

"Yes, colonel," said Fergusson, giving a half military salute.

"If they go quietly, good and well; if they give trouble, report them to Mr. Linnock for punishment when they get there; if they mutiny or try to get away, shoot them. Do you hear?"

"Yes, colonel; certainly."

"Then attend to it."

And the colonel replaced his cigar between his lips, turned on his heel, and left us in the street.

A glance of intelligence passed between my three companions, but they said nothing.

"Come along, you fellows," said Fergusson, harshly;

"the dray's loaded up, and it's time we were making tracks."

We followed him down the street without answering. We made our commencement of the new life under threat of the lash and the bullet.

There was a sort of freedom in it which we all felt and appreciated. We were driven into new slavery, it is true, and compelled to go quietly, but it was a more promising slavery than the one we had left. In the last week of the voyage I had been conscious of the past rather than the present. In the prison I had been weighed down and almost crushed by the horror of the present, only made possible of endurance by the one gleam of human pity which imagination had tortured into a ray of hope. Now, I was conscious in a different way of the present, and it became even possible to take a vague interest in the future.

To the ordinary convict there was mercy in the system. The mere sense of the newness of the country was itself a new life. The mere facts of its vastness, its novelty, and its strangeness suggested and contributed to a new start. To me, also, though in other ways, it was a gain. If I had no background of crime to darken my memory, I had one at least of misery and degradation. That it was endured for others was not always a thought of relief. At times its injustice was even an aggravation. Misery without crime, degradation without wrong-doing. At times I doubted of all things, and right and wrong seemed little more than names.

Nature did me good. My companions, no doubt, thought me sulky, for, after a few coarse advances, they let me alone. Once fairly on the journey, Fergusson became more friendly, and both he and the hand he

had with him seemed to get on well with my companions. Something in my appearance was, I suppose, against me. Something made them ask no questions and offer no friendship to me. I didn't care to inquire the reason of this; I didn't trouble to speculate on its possible consequences.

We went but slowly, and were more than a fortnight on the journey. In that time I had made up my mind. Two things only seemed possible to improve my position, and each of these, I could see, would be difficult to accomplish. I must succeed in satisfying my new master, and, if possible, gaining his confidence; and I must find some means, entirely private, of letting George know the truth. Difficult as these things seemed to be, they would surely, so I thought in my ignorance, prove at least possible. The colonel was certainly not a promising master; but from what I overheard it seemed likely we should see but little of him in person. To do my own work and to mind my own business might at least ensure my being let alone, and the chapter of accidents might at any time do the rest. Was not my life all before me? Was I not able to wait? As for a letter to George, that too must wait.

Meanwhile, my companions seemed more than contented. To my eyes, indeed, they did not look a promising party, yet they evidently found favor in the eyes of Fergusson and his assistant, while I was looked on with suspicion and dislike. It seemed strange at the time, but after all it was only natural. Convicts who were criminals they could understand and get on with; a convict who was not a criminal was an anomaly, and as such he was objectionable. I had the satisfaction of knowing that I was not liked, and the comfort of feeling that somehow I was already looked on with suspicion.

So we gradually made our way into the new country. We reached the colonel's station at last.

The name of the station was "Miami," and it was one of the best in the district. The house stood on a rising ground, which sloped in front to a stream that ran through a flat in front of it. Some pains and money had been spent on making the house both comfortable and picturesque. Of a single story, long and low, with a deep veranda, which the rapid vegetation had already done much to smother in masses of creepers, the house, even from a distance, had an air of refinement and comfort. A garden, bright with flowerbeds and shrubs, stretched down the slope towards the stream, and blushed in the hot rays of the summer sun. Below was a field of maize, now densely green in its first growth, stretching to the bank of the stream, already little more than a watercourse, with here and there a pool in some shady hollow.

Under the warm glow of the western sun that struck level on the house, lighting its windows to a rosy flame and blazing on the garden beds in front, the first sight of the homestead at Miami was, to my eyes, like a dim reflection from the days that were gone—a tender memory of the life that was dead to me. We turned off to the right and left it. Still, my eyes, almost involuntarily, turned back till a clump of native trees shut it out of sight. Beyond the clump were the convict quarters, the life to which I was condemned.

The "huts," as they were called at Miami, were three in number, and stood near together. There was nothing to make them attractive from the outside; there was next to nothing to make them comfortable within. They afforded shelter from the weather to the colonel's convicts, and they afforded nothing more. The colonel

considered, no doubt, that they were good enough for convicts, and, in a sense, he was not far wrong.

Each hut gave shelter to six men, including the cook and hut-keeper for each, and these were all the convicts who were employed about the home station. It was late in spring when we arrived, and the spring work was nearly over. The day after we arrived we were sent to the bush. The work was hard, but in some ways it was the best we could have been set to do. Our work was to split and get out fencing, and so long as we got out enough we were but little interfered with by the overseer.

Yet the life was not an easy one. To walk five miles to the ranges in the morning, to work hard at unaccustomed labor under an Australian sun all day, and then to walk back to the huts at night, would have been hard even for seasoned laborers. To me it was at first exhausting. Many a night I threw myself on the straw of my bunk and fell asleep, too tired to await or to care for the mutton and damper that formed our evening, as it did our morning and midday meal.

One can grow accustomed to anything, and I soon grew accustomed to the work, and ceased to be greatly offended by my company. I was no favorite with my companions, yet I was not molested by them. I was still looked on as sulky, because I had no stories of my own to tell, and no laughter to give to the stories and the jokes of others. Yet the first dislike and suspicion gradually wore off. I went by the name of "Gentleman Jenkins," and, as I did my share of work and never grumbled, I was tacitly allowed to go my own way unmolested and unquestioned.

Once a week—on Sundays—when I had washed my clothes, I used to steal round the clump of bush and lie

on the ground under a tree where I could command a view of the house. It was half a mile off, but still I could see something, and imagine more, of what was going on. The tall military figure of the colonel would pace the long veranda for hours. Younger and less stately figures would sit on the steps, or saunter among the garden beds. Figures of men in broad hats and high boots and riding breeches would come there sometimes, and figures of girls with gauzy dresses and shady parasols at others; sometimes both would be mingled. I got used to them, I recognized them again when they came. I had even names of my own by which I knew them from one another. Among them all, two only, besides the colonel, were nearly always there,—a young man and a girl. I decided that these two belonged to the house. I thought of them as the colonel's son and daughter.

It seems a little thing, but it was much to me. It was strange how utterly we were cut off from the house. None of us were ever permitted, on any pretext, to go there, and it was rare indeed that the huts were visited by any one from the house. The colonel kept his convicts at arm's length, and employed none but free labor near himself.

Thus months passed before I knew more of the people at whom I looked each Sunday than my instinct or my fancy could discover for itself. Yet these fancies were the green spots of my life. The week was one unceasing round of hard work, but on Sundays, when we had washed our clothes, we were free to spend the day unmolested in eating and sleeping. On Sundays, therefore, I could rest and dream; then I could leave my comrades of the week, and for a few short hours cheat myself into forgetfulness of their existence.

Is it a wonder that my Sundays were spent alone in an atmosphere of dreams?

I never grew tired of watching the house and its inmates. The life which we actually live, be it that of prince or peasant, is always commonplace. It is only the life that is gone, or that has not arrived, that has poetry for us. To me the memories and instincts of a lifetime were represented only by what I saw there. The people who lived there were the men and women I knew. The life they were living was the life I knew so well, and had lost so terribly. I couldn't help taking an interest in them. They were the link that bound me still to my own past, the slender bridge that spanned the dark river of despair that flowed between my lost past and my actual present.

There was a good deal of ill feeling among the convicts at the home station. Those of us who worked in the bush saw less of it than the others, because we were absent during the day, and not much inclined to discuss even grievances at night. It was easy, however, to see that it existed, and not difficult to judge that it was rapidly growing more intense. Sundays were the favorite days, of course, for its discussion, and "Long Jim," one of the convicts who came along with me, was generally the chief speaker.

When freemen discuss grievances, it is healthy; when slaves discuss them, it is dangerous. Reform is the result of the first, rebellion of the second. It was rebellion that was brewing on the Miami home station in December, 1834.

I took scarcely any interest in the matter. I had been two months on the station, and in all that time I had hardly seen the overseer half a dozen times, and the colonel, except at a distance, not once. My idea of

improving my position by good behavior seemed likely to end in a dream; my vague hope of discovering means of communicating with my brother appeared more vague and distant now than ever.

Hope is not only the anchor, it is the stimulant of the soul. While it survives, it is impossible that that which is really human in man can die; when it is gone, it is impossible that it can long survive. The utterly hopeless man is the monster of humanity, and day by day I felt myself growing more of a monster and less of a man. My Sunday dreams had done something to save me so far, but I could feel that they were losing their power. My imagination was not less vivid than before, but it was losing its hold and influence upon myself. I could dream of the people and their life as before, I could live as before with them in imagination in that old humanizing life I knew so well; but I felt more and more the hollow mockery of the delusion. The contrast with the reality was too keen, the gulf that separated them too wide, too hopelessly fixed.

A week before Christmas there was trouble at the huts. "Long Jim" and three others refused to obey orders and defied the overseer. The colonel was appealed to, and the colonel was prompt. The four men were marched off at once to the next station under the pistols of the colonel, his nephew, and the overseer. They were tried in the dining-room by the owner, who was, of course, a magistrate, and in ten minutes were condemned to receive thirty lashes apiece. A free man was paid to do the flogging, and did it savagely. When the colonel and his nephew had lunched with Mr. Turner, the convicts were marched home again, all but fainting, under the hot afternoon sun, and with the threat of being shot if they stopped or delayed on the

road. When we reached the huts at night the offence and the punishment were both over, except that the men could not work for two days, and that the scars of the lash could never again be eradicated from the souls of four human beings.

It was only the beginning of trouble. It is always the first step that is so fatal. It is the first foot that crosses the Rubicon which makes retreat well-nigh impossible. This was, at any rate, the case with us. The men who had been flogged were not less rebellious, but they were infinitely more revengeful than before. The disaffection of the few spread quickly to the many, fanned by the sense of helplessness and the sense of injustice and cruelty. The overseer said the devil was in the hands, and it is more than likely he was correct. What share Mr. Turner's justice and Mr. Turner's lashes had in bringing about the possession, neither he nor any other man could tell. On both sides the fatal step had been taken, the fatal stream crossed, and it seemed that return was not possible for either party. Ten days, and only ten, elapsed between the first flogging and Christmas day, and in the time nine men were tried and nine were flogged. One of the same men—"Long Jim"—was flogged a second time, and eight convicts had each been flogged once. On Christmas day there were eighteen of us at the huts: twelve were employed at home, and twelve had been flogged; six were employed in the bush, and so far six had escaped. How long would it last?

On Christmas day we were not expected to work. I spent most of the day alone under a shady tree, staring vacantly at the house and speculating on the figures that appeared on the veranda or wandered through the garden. I had looked forward to the day with a

sort of terror beforehand, and it was with a vague sensation of surprise that I found it passing over my head so quietly. I had thought that on that day of all days in the year the ghosts of the past would have haunted me, and the memories of my other life have made the present one more bitter by the contrast. I was mistaken. I dreamed the day away idly, listlessly, carelessly. Hour after hour found me basking almost without thought in the warm sun, and gazing with half-sleepy eyes on the distant house and garden. I was contented to be alone, to find myself at ease. Was the dead past, then, really dead and forgotten? Had the gulf fixed between that which was and that which had been really separated them, after all?

CHAPTER XII.

I WAS roused by the muffled sound of horses' hoofs, and half raised myself upon my elbow. Two horsemen came round the corner of the clump of bush, and were close upon me before they saw me. My first impulse of curiosity, which had made me sit up, had given place to a wish to appear unconcerned. I remained as I was, leaning on my elbow, but I looked away from the approaching horsemen and fixed my eyes steadily upon the house. The first observation that told me the new-comers had caught sight of me was an oath uttered hastily by the man who saw me first.

"Who the devil are you?" The tone was sharp, commanding, and threatening. Of course I knew he meant me. Equally of course, I declined to know it. I took no notice. He reined up his horse sharply in front of where I lay.

"Who's this fellow, Pinnock?" he asked, in an angry tone.

"One of the hands, sir." It was the overseer's voice that replied. "Jenkins, his name is. One of the last lot."

"A devilish bad lot, too! Here, you Jenkins, what in the name of hell do you mean by lying there staring at the house like that?"

At the sound of the overseer's voice I had looked round. As he addressed me again I looked at the speaker. He was a young man, rather tall and de-

cidedly handsome, but with a haughty, supercilious look on his face that made my blood boil as I looked at him.

"I wanted to see it," I replied, quietly enough, but with every intonation of respect carefully excluded from my voice. I meant to offend the man when I spoke. I intended to make him angry the moment I looked in his face.

"You insolent scoundrel!" he exclaimed; "how dare you speak to me in that way?"

Does the devil enter into men now, as of old? I don't know, but I think so. At that moment I felt as if he had entered into me. There was a sudden tension of all the muscles of my body, that filled me with a wild sense of power—a sudden shock to the brain that for a moment obliterated equally all thought of the past and all consideration of the future. I looked at the man and I hated him. It was no milk-and-water sentiment of dislike, such as we dignify by the name of hatred in the world of civilization. It was with the hatred which does not doubt or hesitate, with the hatred that scorches and kills—the hatred which is hatred, indeed; it was thus, at the moment, I hated him. I sat up and stared at him. My eyes gave him back the contempt of his own. My voice returned him the insolence of his tone.

"And who the devil are you?" I replied, "and what the mischief business is it of yours why I look at the house?" I didn't hurry myself; I spoke the words slowly. I found a positive pleasure—the first I had felt for months, the first I was conscious of having felt since the old life died and the new death began—in speaking them.

He paused and I watched him keenly. He grew

pale. I knew that for the moment this man feared me, and the knowledge gave me pleasure again. It was but for a moment. Suddenly his courage came back to him again. Suddenly he flushed crimson. Then he raised the hunting whip which he carried with sudden energy.

"You blackguard!" he exclaimed, "I'll let you know who I am," and he struck fiercely at me with the lash.

The blow met me, as I rose to my feet, full in the face, and, as I afterwards discovered, it left its mark. At the moment I felt no pain,—only I knew he had struck me, and I was glad. If struck, I could strike again.

I was a powerful man. In the playing fields at Eton, in the meadows, and on the river at Oxford, my strength and activity had been well known among men who could boast of not a little of both. I was stronger now—the result of labor. I was stronger by far, the effect of passion.

How it was done I hardly know, but it was done in a moment. With one step forward I wrested the whip from his hand; with a single gesture I dragged him from his horse. In my grasp he seemed, for the moment, but an infant. His resistance was unfelt. Before he could speak he was at my feet; before he could cry for help he lay at my mercy.

My hand was raised to strike, but I paused. Was it something in his face that arrested the blow? I don't know what it was, nor can I tell why I checked my impulse of revenge. I only know that by some means it was restrained. Had I struck then, it would have been serious. Had the blow fallen it might have proved fatal! Thank God, I did not strike!

"Coward!" I hissed the word at him through teeth that were clenched in the fierceness of my anger.

"Coward! Dog! Take yourself out of this, if you value your wretched life!"

It was all I said. It was all that, at the moment, I seemed to have the power to say. The sight of the man made my eyeballs burn. The words I spoke seemed to choke me as I spoke them. I hurled the whip from me as I said it. I turned and plunged head-long among the trees before the overseer could have reached me if he had tried.

That was the end of my Christmas day. Half an hour of wild struggle with my own feelings left me exhausted. At dusk I crept back to the hut. I threw myself into my bunk. In a few minutes I fell asleep. It was early morning when I awoke. The first sound I heard was the voice of Long Jim at the door of the hut. He was talking to the hut-keeper, who was splitting wood outside.

"Here's a go, Tom! Gentleman Jenkins has been and smashed the young whelp."

"The Gentleman!" returned Tom, in a tone of surprise, pausing at his work.

"Aye! and by all accounts he did it fairish, too. Pity he didn't finish the young brute!"

"Who told ye?"

"Joe. He passed here not five minutes ago, while you were after water. He wants some one to help with rough riding. I wish I could do it, and get out of this hole. There's none of us here can ride, though, I told him, unless it be the Gentleman himself. They say he rode once too often for his health."

"Well, I'm glad Jenkins showed up for once. I always thought there was a spice of the devil about him somewhere, though he's so confoundedly quiet. Did he smash the whelp much?"

"Joe said he heard it was pretty fair, only not enough to keep him quiet. The Gentleman'll get it hot afore he's much older!"

"No harm, either! He's the sort that ain't no good till you draws blood. I know's 'em. As good as gold while they're on the lay. Once put 'em off, and stand clear."

"All serene, mate; it's like enough we'll want him afore long. The more the merrier!"

I have given the substance only of what I heard, leaving out the oaths, which would have extended it fully a third.

Long Jim's footsteps went round towards the other huts, and Tom finished splitting his wood. I lay still and thought. It was true that I need expect no mercy. Could I be punished for what I did? I had struck no actual blow, and all I had done was done in self-defence after I was struck by him. I could not be punished by law most likely, but what was law in the bush? What was law, above all, for a convict? I thought it over; and as I did so not the scene only but the feelings also came back to me. Once more my muscles swelled and hardened, and my veins seemed to run molten fire in place of blood. Once more my brain seemed to burn, and I could feel my eyes dilate and flash. Let it come! I had done no more than any man would do when insulted and outraged. I had done nothing like that which I had been tempted to do. Let it come!

At breakfast I could see that the word had been passed around, and that every one knew. They said nothing, but they looked at me with a new kind of interest which was hardly pleasant. It was as if they were disposed to claim friendship with me in a way they had never done and I had never desired. I felt

as if in some way I had taken a step towards becoming one of themselves.

We were just starting for the bush when they arrived—the colonel, his nephew, the overseer, and two other men. Every one was mounted, and every man was armed. I stood in the doorway and looked at them as they came up.

“Which of them was it?” asked the colonel, half turning to his nephew, who rode behind him.

“That scoundrel!” he replied, pointing to me.

“Ha! That man!” and the colonel knit his heavy brows and stared angrily at me under his bushy iron-gray eyebrows. I returned his stare without flinching and without moving. I think he was amazed at that. I fancy he was disappointed.

“I’ll crush it! By heaven, I will! If I crush every scoundrel of the pack along with it! You fellow, what’s your name again?”

“Jenkins, colonel,” I replied, shortly.

“Then, Jenkins, mark me; I told you before you came here that if you behaved well you would be well treated. I didn’t tell you what would happen if you behaved badly, but I’ll show you now. I’ll have no mutiny on my station! Will you go quietly?” he added, laying a hand as he spoke on the handle of a pistol at his holster.

“Where to?” I said, looking him steadily in the face.

“To the nearest magistrate, you ruffian!” he answered, angrily.

My coolness was exasperating him, I could see. My steady look was making him both angry and uncomfortable.

“Certainly. I have nothing to fear from justice. I can’t say as much for that young man behind you.”

As I spoke, the stockman, called Joe, rode up, leading a powerful young colt that looked something less than half broken.

"That's right. We have no time to lose. Can you ride, you insolent rascal?" said the colonel, angrily.

I looked at the old man, and smiled. I thought how his stiff lumbering military seat would look over a heavy hunting country such as I had been brought up to.

"A little," I said, dryly.

I could see that he noticed the smile. I could easily believe that he misunderstood it, but I cared nothing for that.

"Mount, then," he said, turning away.

I flung myself carelessly on the horse's back. In a moment he reared upright, and pawed the air fiercely with his fore hoofs. I struck him lightly with my open hand behind the ears, and he came down. I had raised the devil, however, by my carelessness, and the Australian horse-devil is no easy spirit to master. I was in the mood to master it now. The devil in the horse was as nothing to the same spirit once roused in the man, and so he found it. For fully ten minutes the struggle lasted, and while it lasted it was fierce. Then he gave in. Without a whip, without a spur, I mastered him. If he had been ten times as strong and ten times as wild, I had it in me to master him then. The horsemen drew back and looked on while the struggle lasted. Only Joe exclaimed, heartily, "Bravo, mate!" when it was evident that I had won the victory. The colonel looked on quietly, grimly, with a sort of savage satisfaction, I fancied, but with nothing of sympathy.

At last, with heaving flanks and distended nostrils, the horse stood still. The colonel turned his horse and

rode off. The overseer and one of the men rode beside me, one on each side, and each with his hand on a pistol. I could see they were afraid of me. My struggle with the horse had neither removed nor diminished their fear. The fierce excitement of the effort had done me good. I was not less fiercely excited than before, but I was now more able to control myself. I went silently.

An hour or so of sharp riding brought us to Turner's station. The house was something like our own, but smaller, and with less attempt at beauty. As we rode up, the owner came on the veranda to receive us.

"Hallo, colonel! Another? Hadn't you better import a police magistrate on your own account?"

The colonel dismounted and went in with him for a few minutes while we sat on our horses outside. I knew that these men were busy deciding my fate. I knew that my case was being settled in the parlor while both prisoner and witnesses were sitting out in the blazing sun. Strange as it may seem, the knowledge seemed to give me little concern. I employed my time in observing the house and taking a look at the garden. In five minutes they had settled it. We were called in, and the overseer, the nephew, and I obeyed the call, leaving the two men outside with the horses. I had no hope of escape, and, strange to say, I had no fear of the consequences. As I glanced at the magistrate sitting at the end of the table, and looked at the colonel sitting near him, it seemed to me that they were the persons most interested; that, somehow or other, they had most cause to fear. In a sense, at least, I was right. The proceedings were short and very simple. The colonel was sworn, and said I was a convict, reprieved from the death to which I had been sentenced for robbery and murder. I had been duly assigned to

him as a servant, and, though he had not seen much of me himself, he had always considered me a dangerous and turbulent man. The nephew was sworn, and told the story of the assault. To do him justice, he told very nearly the facts, and, as he told them, I looked at the magistrate. He merely glanced at me in return, and took no further notice.

"The overseer was also present, if you wish to hear him," remarked the colonel, when his nephew had told his story.

"No, I think it is quite unnecessary. The matter seems simple enough, I think. Prisoner, have you anything to say in answer to this charge?"

"Nothing sir, except this, that having heard the evidence you will of course acquit me."

"Acquit you! What the devil do you mean by 'acquit' you? The scoundrel's a bush lawyer, I do believe."

"Only this, sir: the assault was committed upon me, not by me. All I did was done in self-defence, and I never struck a blow, though, as you can see, I got one. When you have acquitted me, I have a charge to lay against this man who has just given evidence for it."

For a moment the magistrate was staggered. I could see it in the look he cast on me. I could see it also in the look he turned for a moment on the colonel. Then the full enormity of the position seemed to dawn upon him. He stared at me in open-mouthed surprise at my audacity, and a red flush mounted to his face.

"And that's all you have to say, is it? A pretty pass things are coming to here! Well, colonel, you've got a very pretty specimen in this fellow—enough to corrupt a whole district, and make every convict in it fancy himself a free man. I wish you joy of your bar-

gain. In the mean time,"—he turned to me again, as he spoke,—“in the mean time, you insolent ruffian, the court sentences you to five-and-twenty lashes, and, if you come before me again, I'll make it fifty.”

As he spoke I looked him full in the face. The past, with all its associations of pain and wretchedness, with all its humanizing associations, also of a life far different from this, seemed to fade away and die; the present, with its injustice, violence, and outrage, seemed to draw near and close me in. I said nothing; I only looked at him. Then he added, hastily, “Remove the fellow at once, and let the sentence of the court be executed. And, colonel, you'll have some lunch while you wait?”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE colonel had lunch with the magistrate, and I—I was flogged! The words look simple, cold, and commonplace on paper, but in this they wrong the event. The men who talk glibly of corporal punishment and its salutary effect—ah, these men talk of what they know nothing of! So long as a man is still a man—a creature composed of soul as well as of body—so long, in other words, as he has not sunk to the level of the brute, corporal punishment—really corporal punishment—is an impossibility. The body, it is true, may be struck; it is the soul that is outraged. The back only may show the scars of the lash, but the real scars lie deeper and are incurable.

I did not tamely submit to my fate. What fiercest passion, aided by unusual strength, could do against numbers I did. The colonel did well to bring force to carry out his design, for it was all and more than all required. Nevertheless, numbers at last prevailed, and the deed was done, the foul deed of outraging and degrading an innocent man. I had been flogged—publicly flogged as a convict, an outcast, a creature to be trampled on and crushed.

To the storm of rage and despair that swept over me there succeeded a great calm that was ominous. The blow had fallen at last which could not be effaced: the Rubicon was passed which made as well as proclaimed me an enemy of society.

They released me slowly, for they were not sure

what I might do on my release; and several of them had already more experience than they cared for of what I was capable of. They need not have hesitated. The temper that resists outrage is usually prompt and daring; the temper which takes revenge for wrongs is sullen, and bides its time. When released, I looked at my persecutors, but I was silent. I replaced the coarse shirt over my wounds without a word—without a word I stooped and picked up my hat from the place where it had fallen when I struggled with six men at once and in my fury had nearly conquered my freedom. In silence and slowly I turned away. A hand touched my arm, and a voice I recalled said in a low tone, "Mate!" I turned, and was face to face with Tom Mayhew. It was Tom's face, but it was changed. The glance of his eye was no longer free and pleasant, but moody and fierce. The tone of his voice was at once guarded and bitter, as if bearing with it the sense of unuttered wrongs.

"You, too, Tom?" I muttered, answering the evidence of his face and of his voice.

"Me, too," he answered, in a sullen whisper. "Will they let you come to the huts and get washed, I wonder?"

"Washed! No, Tom, not washed yet."

For an instant he looked at me, and the look was returned, and the fire which at the moment seemed to be scorching my heart and withering my brain lit up his eyes also as he looked at me.

"Right, mate," he whispered, "right! Wait till by and by."

"Come!" It was the harsh voice of Pinnock the overseer that broke in. The tone was not improved, and the temper may well have suffered from the blow

which he had received in the mouth when he joined the others in the attempt to overpower me.

"Come! no more chat; you fellows are after no good when you whisper. You, Jenkins, come along with me! And you," looking at Tom, who fiercely returned his stare, "be off about your own business, or you'll have trouble on your own account, my fine fellow."

Without a word I followed him back to the house and was locked into the woodshed till they were ready to go back. I sat on a log and waited. The flogging had been severe, and at times a sensation of sickness crept over me, but I was totally unconscious of pain. My body felt benumbed, but not so my mind. The wild feelings of wrong and outrage, the fierce sense of bitter helplessness and bitter degradation, these were the sensations I felt; and these burned and lacerated my mind till the cold perspiration started on my brow, and the great drops of agony trickled down my face, and dropped slowly like tears to the ground. I was left there, it may have been for an hour—it may have been longer—I took no heed of time—while the colonel and his nephew had lunch. It might have been for a lifetime, so changed was the human being who emerged from the shed when it was over and stared round him with a dull sense of wonder on the bright sunshine and the sparkling flowers.

Not a word was spoken. I mounted when the others did. I followed the colonel, his nephew, and the overseer back to the station. If the colonel looked at me, I did not see it. If his nephew gloried in my degradation, I had not even glanced at him to surprise the look on his face. We went home.

My comrades received me with a coarse cordiality.

They evidently looked on me at last as one of themselves. I saw it, and instinctively I shrank from it. This seemed to me the last and worst injury inflicted on me; the crowning degradation, to which all the others led up. Yet my companions were right. I had become one of themselves. I could not take part in their coarse conversation nor enjoy their coarse stories and their foul jokes more than formerly, indeed, but I felt with them now, and had no longer any sympathy with their oppressors. The colonel had forced me to take my place, and he had convinced me for the time at least that my place was with the convicts.

For two days I stayed at the huts, and I had plenty of time for thought. For my own peace of mind I should have been better—ininitely better—at the hardest work. They were awful days to me, more awful by far than the day of the mock trial and the hideous execution. A human soul does not sink without a struggle, as mine was sinking then. On one side was ranged my past life with all its influences, all its impulses for good; on the other the intolerable sense of wrong, and the burning fire of shame and indignation which seemed to drive back every better and nobler feeling, and to concentrate itself into one fierce craving for revenge. And the past life was distant and shadowy; the present wrongs were urgent and terrible. Religion might have turned the scale, perhaps, but religion was to me a thing of custom, habit, and surroundings. In the moment of need, religion was but a name. In the death struggle of the soul, it was no more than a legend of the past.

Does this seem strange? If so, try to think of my case. Try to place yourself for one short hour in my position, and I venture to say you will understand it

better. Here was I, an innocent man, conscious of his innocence, degraded from my place among men to the level of a beast, made to herd with criminals, insulted, outraged, and all without fault of my own. No, it is not strange. Only a superhuman power could have upheld me and saved me, then.

I was no longer so carefully excluded from the plans of my companions as formerly, and I found that they were dangerous. The new country had been unfortunate in its first settlers. The dangerous feeling was a wide-spread one, and communication between the plotters was well established and frequent. The cruelties and oppressions of Turner had for many months made him a marked man; and now the sudden and fierce severity of the colonel had put him too into the black list. Arms only were wanting now to make a score of desperate convicts into a score of desperate bushrangers, and to bring down a terrible vengeance on their masters.

Of course I did not learn this all at once. Even in the huts such subjects were not openly discussed. It was only little by little, from a hint dropped here and whispered talk overheard there, passing from bunk to bunk in the darkness of the night, that I gradually learned the state of matters.

Shall I tell the whole truth? Yes, I rejoiced! It had even come to this, I was glad. The idea of revenge, a full, bitter, sudden revenge, was the one idea which seemed to afford me relief. Had I given way to my feelings I should have waited for nothing. Oh, to have once more that sleek-faced young tiger at my feet as I had him once, when I spared him! Oh, to measure out to that haughty, cruel old man some small share of that misery and suffering which consumed my heart

as if with fire. If I had obeyed my impulse I should have gone straight to the house and taken my chance of revenge, even with the certainty of death.

But no. It was a foolish impulse. I should have failed of revenge. I should not have failed to get shot. At the time I cared nothing for life for its own sake, but it became basely precious to me as a means of retribution on others. Unarmed and desperate, I could but die: with patience I might at least die fearfully avenged. So I waited. I listened to what fell from the others, and, though I said nothing, I think not one of them doubted my readiness to join in any scheme of vengeance, however desperate it might be. At my work I brooded over my wrongs: with an axe in my hand I struck each blow as if it were the death-blow of an enemy. By night I listened to plots, and I slept only to dream of revenge.

Once and once only I went back to my Sunday lounging-place. It was on the Sunday after I first heard of the schemes of vengeance that were on foot. I went to think over what I had heard; to reckon up the chances of our success, and the time likely still to elapse before the hour could arrive. Grimly I watched the tall figure of the colonel as he paced the long veranda. I watched with a glow of fierce satisfaction the slighter form of his nephew smoking a cigar on a lounge at one end. My imagination was busy with a far different scene, when these two should see at last that they must reap as they had sown. I could fancy I saw the flames bursting through the roof and hear the sharp reports of pistols and the stern voices of men to whom life was nothing and revenge everything. And then, as I looked, I saw a figure in white come out on the veranda and trip down the steps

lightly into the garden. In an instant a thought struck me. And what of her? She was utterly a stranger to me. I had never seen her much more nearly than I saw her now. But she was a girl, and in her pure dress and broad hat she looked young, graceful, innocent. She at least had done no wrong. What of her in the hour of vengeance? Crushed, changed, embittered to the brink of crime, I was in some ways a gentleman still. There were still thoughts I could not face, and this was one of them. I started up. I turned my back upon the place. I shut out that slight girlish figure from my sight. I went no more to look at the house. Was the sign a good or a bad one? Bad, I think. My intention had not changed. I would only shut my eyes to the consequences.

The summer was dry and very hot. Not a drop of rain fell, and the burning sun and hot wind seemed to parch the ground and banish every vestige of moisture. One evening about the middle of February or a little earlier, when I got home from the range, I saw the overseer and Joe the stockman standing at the hut waiting. None of us liked the overseer, but Joe was a general favorite among the hands. As I came up I nodded to Joe and took no notice of his companion.

"Sulky still, eh?" exclaimed Pinnock, with a short, uneasy laugh. "Come, come, Jenkins, drop that now, my man. It wasn't my doing you got into trouble; and for my share you paid me out with two broken teeth. You needn't keep it up."

I thought his voice sounded as if he was uneasy, and I was glad of it. As he spoke, I turned to him; as he went on I looked him steadily in the face. I dare say the look was hardly a pleasant one; at any rate his face fell and his tone changed as he continued, hastily,—

"How would you fancy a new job for a bit?" I glanced at Joe, and I understood his meaning.

"I don't much care," I replied. "What is it?"

"Joe wants another hand to help with the beasts, and he thinks you'll do. You'd better have a try at it anyhow. You can go with Joe in the morning instead of going back to the bush."

He turned and went into the hut. I could see that he was annoyed at the failure of his attempt at reconciliation, and I wondered if he suspected that mischief was preparing among the hands. When he was gone I turned to Joe. He came up to me and spoke cordially.

"Look here, mate!" he said. "Give us a hand, will you? it's work I think you'll like when once you're used to it, and I think I'll be about as good company as some you've got here. I know you can ride, and you'll want to. The very mischief won't keep these beasts in one place this weather, and unless we have rain soon we'll have the devil's own mess with them. You'll give us a hand, won't you?"

I looked in the man's face: it was uncultivated, but honest and friendly. I held out my hand, and he grasped it. It was the grasp of man to man, not the greeting of man to slave. The contract was ratified then.

"All right, mate," I said. "What time do you start in the morning?"

"I'll bring round a horse about four. We'll get tucker up the ranges."

"All right; I'll be ready!"

As I went into the hut the overseer came out. He looked at me as if he were half inclined to speak again. I waited till he passed, but took no notice. So I changed my employment again—so Providence gave me one more chance of escape!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE change of employment was a new life. The contrast, indeed, of the old and the new was almost as great as the contrast between that and the life that was older still. To cast off the drudgery of the bush labor and the constant society of men whose ideas were always debased and their language always coarse and disgusting, was in itself an infinite relief. To be free of the dingy hut, with its sordid surroundings and its foul inmates, this was like a resurrection to a new life.

The work was both hard and constant. The season was unfavorable for cattle, and the station was as yet almost entirely a cattle station. Two previous seasons had been dry, and this third one promised to be even drier than they had been. For months there had not been a drop of rain. The long rolling plains, covered with herbage, indeed, but dry and brown, offered little to tempt the beasts, while the absolute want of water in the accustomed places made them wander further and further. The streams of other seasons had dwindled first to water-holes, and already the water-holes were nearly all dry or reduced to swampy spots, puddled by the feet of the cattle. More and more the cattle scattered, and our work—that is Joe's and mine—was to look after those on the western side of the run and see that they did not wander too far from water. Many a day Joe and I rode over wide stretches of plain where not a sign of life was visible but a few kangaroos or an

emu or two stalking, stately and solitary. Many a night we camped at the foot of some giant gum-tree which rose weird and grey overhead, as if in silent protest against the rash disturbers of its ancient solitary reign. Joe was not much of a talker, and silence was generally a relief to me, so we were a well-assorted pair. I have often caught him looking at me with a curious wistful expression when he thought I didn't see him, as if he would fain have learned more of my history, but dare not ask me. I made no sign.

I had my choice of the young half-broken horses, and the one I chose had given me a great deal of trouble at first. He was worth it all. He was wild, and hard to master, indeed, but he was swift, strong, and of remarkable endurance. Before I had ridden him for a month he and I thoroughly understood each other, and he would submit to no one else. To me he was like a friend, and I learned to fancy that he knew and sympathized with my moods; sometimes he appeared almost to know my thoughts. At my new work I had greater opportunities of seeing and learning what went on at the home station and the house than formerly. To the house, indeed, in accordance with the colonel's rule, I never went. I often went to report for orders to the overseer's house, and Joe often went up to "The Hall," as I now found it was called by those privileged to go there; but I never went nearer than the entrance of the field known as the "Home paddock." Still, I saw more both of the people and their habits than before. I often saw the colonel and his nephew—"the captain," he was called—at a distance, though I carefully avoided anything like close contact with either of them. Frequently, too, I saw one or other of them accompanying a lady on horseback—no doubt the same

I had seen on the last Sunday I had stood gazing at the house. I could bear better to look at her now. The life I now was leading was a healthier life, and if I had not definitely abandoned the dreams of vengeance which had so fearfully occupied my mind, they were at least in abeyance. There was something that pleased my eye in the sight of this girl at a distance, something easy and graceful in her seat and in her bearing. I had always thought a graceful woman was never so graceful as on horseback, a young and beautiful woman never so enchanting as when well mounted. This girl, even at a distance, reminded me of scenes long passed away, and, strange to say, the sight of her did not recall these scenes with pain.

So the days and weeks passed, and still I remained at my new work. Still the drought grew more intense and the toil of our work grew greater. To me this part of it was nothing. I liked the toil—it kept me from thinking. I enjoyed the constant movement and excitement of the life, for these kept me from dwelling upon the past, or trying vainly to forecast the future.

It was about the first week in March, and the weather was frightfully hot. Joe and I had for the last three days been trying to find a mob of cattle which had strayed away to the westward about a fortnight before. We had come on their tracks the night before, and all day long we had followed them towards the ranges. Since nine in the morning we had not come across a sign of water, and we and our horses were both pretty nearly exhausted by four o'clock in the afternoon, beneath a burning sun and with the wind that came hot and scorching from the north, making the skin of our faces dry and harsh.

The cattle had been here not long ago. We could

see where they had strayed, biting and breaking the small shrubs that abounded, but we could not be certain which way they had gone. We both dismounted and searched for tracks. It was important now to do this, for we were just outside the system of gullies that ran up into the ranges between the spurs which now lay before us, rising gradually like buttresses to the full height of the western range, perhaps a thousand feet high, and crowned with forest. If we struck the wrong gully we should miss the beasts altogether, for once in the gully, we should be unable to see or hear anything beyond it. After some time lost in trying unsuccessfully to make sure, Joe shouted to me to try the gully to the right and he would try the other. I mounted and rode forward. At first I saw traces of cattle, and thought I must be on the right track. I rode hastily on till I fairly opened the gully before me. It was wild, solitary, and beautiful with tree-ferns, shrubs, and wild flowers that sprang from each hollow, overhung the rocks, and blazed in masses of rich color on the slopes, but there was not a sign of the cattle. A frightened bandicoot scudded across the track, and a hundred parrots screamed at me in harsh tones from the bushes, but there were no other signs of life. I reined up "Fireking,"—the name given to my horse, in memory of some escape from bush fire of which he was the hero as a colt,—and, shading my eyes, tried to find some trace of the missing beasts. There was none. They could not be in the gully, and it would be vain to go further. I wheeled Fireking and rode slowly back. Suddenly I came on the track again. It turned sharply aside towards the dividing range between my gully and the next, only a little way inside the entrance. Even to my inexperienced eye this seemed

strange. I followed it and was still more surprised to see that the track was clear and well defined. The cattle had not strayed about to feed, but had followed one another in the same track. It dawned upon me in an instant: they had been driven. In the sudden excitement of the new idea, I touched Fireking with the spur, and he bounded forward. In less than a minute we reached the crown of the dividing range, and I looked into the gully selected by Joe. It was a broader one than mine, and must usually have had a strong stream of water through it. I could see the watercourse winding along the bottom, overhung by drooping ferns and thick clumps of various shrubs, but the stones in its course now glittered brightly in the sunshine, and there was not a trace of water as far as my eye could follow it up the little valley.

I looked round for Joe, but there was no sign of either horse or rider. I raised a long "coo-ee!" to attract his attention, but the scattered boulders on the opposite ridge alone gave me back an answer. He must have gone on. I let Fireking go, and cantered along on the track of the cattle. As I went I reflected. I had no experience, indeed, but one thing was pretty clear even to me: if the cattle had been driven, they had been driven by blacks, for we were the only white men in the district. I had heard a good deal of blacks, but had never seen any. It was said that they were great thieves, and sometimes very dangerous, but this gave me little concern. In my state of mind an adventure of any kind would be a pleasant excitement, and the element of danger had no terror whatever. I shook Fireking's rein and hurried on.

The track led down the slope into the gully, and I followed it. Then it crossed the dry watercourse, and

I followed it up the opposite bank. Then it turned up towards the range. I paused. If Joe had come as far as this he must have seen the track and followed it. If he had not come as far, he had gone back, and was waiting for me. I rose in my stirrups and once more gave the wild, piercing "coo-ee" of the country. Then I listened. Far away it echoed and re-echoed, first on one side of the gully, then on the other, but it brought no answering shout. I decided that he had gone on, and that some bend of the gully had cut off the sound either from him or from me. Once more I touched the horse with the spur, shook the rein, and followed the track.

The afternoon sun poured hot and scorching across the gully. The huge boulders that strewed the slopes and the tall, feathery tree-ferns and scattered sheock-trees that grew here and there threw shadows that were growing longer from the west, but it was blazing hot still. However, it was a likely place, and there was good hope of finding water-holes near the top of the creek. Fireking seemed to know this, for he hurried on at a sharp canter. It was a long gully, and the track led up the middle of it. I must have ridden a good two miles before it bent suddenly to the westward, and I got the full blaze of the sun in my face. The gully was growing narrower, too, and the bush on the slopes was thicker and stronger. I stopped, and putting both hands to my mouth, gave a prolonged "coo-ee" once more. It was strange how wildly and shrilly it came back to me, but as I paused to listen I thought I heard a reply far up the valley. It sounded distant and faint, but it was not the echo of my own shout, but another. I thought of the blacks, and the blood rushed over me with a sudden glow. This time I did my best to rouse Fireking to something more

than a canter, and I succeeded. The horse seemed to know and to share my excitement, for he pricked up his ears and started forward at a long stretching gallop along the sandy bottom of the gully. Another bend, and it opened into a comparatively wide spot like a basin, fenced in by the range on all sides but that by which we entered.

Yes, it was Joe and some at least of the cattle. Joe had headed them back, and was driving them towards me. When I came in sight they were just reaching the place where the gully grew narrow. One or two of the foremost beasts were passing close to the high scrub which came down the right-hand ridge nearly to the edge of the watercourse. The cattle were going steadily enough. I could see they must have had water, so I pushed on in the hope of getting some for Fireking and myself.

Suddenly I saw half a dozen dark figures rise out of the scrub alongside the leading beast and a half-dozen spears strike the two foremost. With a loud bellow they turned on their tracks and rushed back on the others, causing a stampede. It was in vain that Joe tried to turn them; they passed him in an instant. Another moment and I could see that the spears were being thrown at him. He turned his horse as if to reach the more open ground, but he had gone only a few yards when another party of five or six sprang out of the scrub on the other side and began to throw spears at him, too. With a yell of excitement I stuck my spurs into Fireking's flanks and charged down upon them at full gallop, with no weapon but a long stock-whip which I had taken a special pride in learning to use.

Before I could reach the place, several spears had

struck Joe's horse, which staggered and fell. Joe started to his feet and was in the very act of pointing the carbine he always carried slung across his back at his assailants when a spear struck him also. I could see him stagger and let his gun fall. With a wild yell the blacks ran in closer. In the excitement they had not noticed me till I was close to them. Then with a shout wilder, I dare say, if possible, than their own, I struck with my long whip at the nearest as I came on. The long snake-like lash struck him in the face and he staggered and fell. In a moment I was among them. Doubling the heavy thong repeatedly in my hand I struck right and left with the short heavily-loaded handle of the whip. I have mentioned that I was an unusually powerful man, and now I was wild with anger and excitement. At each blow I seemed to strike a man, and each man when struck seemed to go down as if struck by lightning. In a moment they broke with wild yells of fear, and took to flight up the gully while I spurred Fireking after them. Unused to horses, and still more unaccustomed to such a weapon as I was using, they were evidently panic-struck, rushing in their fear past a score of places where my horse could not have followed them. Gradually first one and then another darted into the scrub, scarcely one having retained his spears in his flight.

By the time the last had escaped, I had got close to a water-hole not yet dried up, and here I could see, from the ashes and the scattered bones, what had been the fate of one at least of our beasts. I paused and dismounted. It was necessary that both Fireking and I should drink, even if it were not altogether safe. Then I mounted and rode hastily back to where I had left Joe. His horse lay dead by the side of the track,

and Joe himself was sitting on the ground leaning against the body. I threw myself from Fireking as I came up, exclaiming,—

“Not much hurt, Joe, I hope!”

He turned his head and looked at me in a stupid hesitating kind of way, quite different from his usual manner.

“I don’t know, mate, I feel very queer. You frightened those black devils off?”

“More than that, I expect, so far as some of them go,” I replied, with a keen sense of satisfaction; “there’s two or three of them won’t go very far, I fancy, yet awhile!”

“That’s right, mate—though, poor devils, they don’t know no better, I dare say.”

I raised him in my arms and found the place where he had pulled out the spear. It was in his side, and it didn’t seem to have bled much.

“Oh,” I said, “you’ll be all right presently. I had better get you out of this, though. These niggers will be back again, I dare say.”

With a great deal of difficulty, for he seemed nearly powerless to help himself, I got him upon Fireking and mounted behind him. I had to pass my arm round him to hold him on, and he leaned against my breast. Fortunately the horse was strong, and the water seemed to have restored him, so that he was able to canter slowly with our double weight. The level sun was just dipping behind the range when I got clear of the gully, and very glad I felt to get clear of it and to see the long stretch of open country before me.

I went as easily as I could, for the sake of my companion. Occasionally I spoke to him, but he only answered sleepily, and as if he disliked the exertion. I grew more and more uncomfortable both in body and mind, as his body seemed to press against me more and

more as a dead weight, but there was nothing for it but to push on.

The rose tints faded from the plain in front and then from the sky overhead. One by one the quiet, soft, liquid stars shone out with a calm lustre. Little by little it grew dark; and yet we journeyed on. I knew the direction of the home station, and with that strange lifeless-feeling burden leaning against me I dared not stop.

For hours I rode on slowly under the silent stars, and I was more than half benumbed by Joe's weight pressing upon me as I rode. At last I let the horse stop. I spoke to Joe, but he gave me no answer. Slowly and painfully I contrived to dismount, still supporting him in the saddle. Then I let him go and he slipped slowly from the saddle into my arms and thence to the ground. Benumbed as I was, I can hardly say that I lifted him down. I somehow knew that my comrade was gone!

That was a strange, wild night to me. Out there on the wide plain—the only human being within miles. I sat sorrowfully beside Joe's body on the harsh brown grass, the night wind sighing with a strange ghostly "swish" across the plain, and the pale, sorrowful-looking stars gazing down on the scene. I was very lonely. Joe had been not exactly a friend, but at least very cordial and friendly to me—the nearest thing to a friend I had known in my degradation.

At last weariness overcame me. The stars overhead grew watery and misty and danced strangely before my eyes. The sound of the monotonous night breeze with its changeless whisper soothed my ears; and at last I sank quietly to sleep with my head on my saddle and my right arm thrown protectingly over the dead body of Joe at my side.

CHAPTER XV.

It was broad daylight when I awoke, and as I sat up I startled a great bird like a crow which had perched on the ground a few paces off. I understood it. What I had been slow to discover last night the bird had discovered at daybreak. Joe was dead. I ate a few mouthfuls of the food we carried, and then caught Fireking and saddled him. Then slowly and reverently I lifted Joe and set him on the horse and mounted behind him once more. I had no means of burying his body, and I couldn't leave it to the crow.

Dead! And I carrying him home. The idea was strange and ghastly. The solitude of his death, the strangeness of that ghastly death-bed on the horse, slowly pacing under the silent stars,—everything about the event awoke busy trains of thought, and strange images in my mind as I clasped the dead body of my comrade, and made my slow way across the long deserted plain.

It was afternoon when I came in sight of the home station and rode slowly towards the overseer's quarters. Before I could reach the place three persons on horseback seemed to notice and come to meet me. I would gladly have avoided them, but I felt that I must go on. I could see that the colonel was one of the party long before he came up. As he came near he evidently noticed that something was amiss, for he quickened his pace and rode up hastily.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, "you, sir, what's that you've got?"

"Joe, sir," I answered, simply. "He's dead!"

"Dead! How's that? What does it all mean?"

His voice was as usual stern and peremptory, but at the moment I didn't seem to feel it as I had done at other times. I held my dead comrade in my arms, and many a strange and solemn thought that had lately passed through my mind was with me still.

"Killed," I said. "Speared by the blacks last night up at the western range."

"Last night! And you've brought him from there since then?"

"It couldn't be done," said another voice, which I knew and remembered only too well, with a slight affected drawl in his tone. "It's thirty miles if it's one, colonel. The fellow's most likely lying, I should say."

I half turned and faced him as he came near. My eye caught his and held it for an instant. He turned hastily away.

"Kate!" he exclaimed, "this is no sight for you. Let me take you back, unless you prefer to ride on."

Unconsciously I followed his words. My eyes, as he spoke, followed his eyes. I started. There within ten yards of us, sitting lightly and easily on her horse, was the girl I had seen that last day on board the convict-ship. There were the same large pitiful eyes, the same tender mouth, the same gentle maidenly look of sympathy and feeling. And I—at the moment I was looking at her with eyes that blazed with a sense of resentment and wrong across the dead body of my comrade, Joe.

Yes, it was she! I could not be mistaken in that face. I could not be in error about those eyes. I

stared at her wonderingly, stupidly, the fire of passion dying out of my own eyes as I looked. The colonel spoke again.

"Well, at any rate let us be just. You are Jenkins, are you not?" At the name I thought Miss Malcolm started a little and moved nearer.

"Yes, sir, Jenkins," I replied.

"Where did this happen?"

"In one of the gullies running up into the western range."

"What were you doing there?"

"Looking after a mob of beasts that had strayed."

"And the blacks, did they attack you?"

"No, sir, they attacked him before I came up."

"And you—do you say you found him, or rescued him?"

"A little of both, sir. I frightened the blacks off. I don't know that I didn't kill one or two of them."

"What weapons had you?"

"This, sir!" I said, indicating the whip hung round my shoulder.

"A whip! You faced the blacks, you say, with a whip?"

"Certainly, sir. I had nothing else to face them with."

He looked at me steadily and searchingly for a moment; then he said, "Am I to believe this?"

I think my face must have flushed. I believe my indignation must have shown itself in my eyes, but I only said,—

"As you please, colonel. I shouldn't wonder if there was a black or two in the gully still."

"Dead, you mean?"

"Dead, I mean, colonel."

He looked at me strangely and suspiciously, yet with an expression of doubt. At that moment Miss Malcolm touched him on the arm. He looked round hastily.

"What is it, my dear?" he said. "I thought you had gone. You had better ride on with Reginald."

"No, papa, not yet. That's the man I told you about. That is the man who rescued the little boy."

"That! Yes, yes, I remember! but that has nothing to do with this affair."

Once more I gazed in her face. Once more I seemed powerless to withdraw my eyes, while she spoke.

"I think it has, papa. People don't risk their lives to save children and then murder other people, do they?"

It was said so quietly that it carried conviction. The colonel hesitated and looked at me.

"You are sure it is the same, Kate?" he said, irresolutely.

"Quite certain, papa."

"Very well; at any rate we can go and see. I dare say you are right, though. Here, you Jenkins—take him on to Mr. Pinnock's house and tell him I want him here."

Slowly I withdrew my eyes; reluctantly I turned away. The last I saw of her she was looking after me. The last impression she left on my mind was one of pity and sympathy.

I took Joe to the overseer's and gave him the message. Then I rode back again along with him. Miss Malcolm and the captain had gone, but the colonel was where I had left him. As we came up he looked hard at me, but said nothing. When we pulled up he said to the overseer,—

"I suppose you have heard Jenkins's account of this

unfortunate business, Pinnock. I think he had better take us to see the place. We'll start at daybreak tomorrow. You had better come, too."

Next morning we started. We reached the gully and, to my surprise, found it undisturbed. The remains of Joe's horse were still there, though much torn by birds, and the three spears were still sticking in his carcass. There were also three dead blacks lying as they had fallen when I struck them with the whip-handle. The blacks had evidently decamped without coming back even to look for their spears, which still lay scattered where they had dropped them.

It was enough. Even the captain could not deny that my story was fully corroborated beyond the possibility of doubt. We had no means of burying the dead blacks, so we went home, driving the cattle before us, and leaving the dead where we had found them. For aught I know their bones still bleach amidst the flowers and ferns of that lonely gully.

Before we got home again the body of my poor comrade had been buried.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALTHOUGH severe and suspicious, the colonel could be just. The result of his investigation was favorable to me, and, in spite of prejudice against me, he admitted it. To me, indeed, he only said, "That's all right, Jenkins," but he told the overseer to keep me at the same work, and in fact to put me in Joe's position. It was wise in his own interests, no doubt, for we were now very short-handed with stockmen, and I had learned much while I worked with Joe, but it was a great boon to me.

I was sorry for Joe's loss, but I hardly missed his company. In fact, I was glad to be alone and to work alone. Solitude was at the time the greatest relief of which my mind seemed capable. The first bitterness of the sense of shame, outrage, and humiliation which had lashed and goaded me to seek revenge was already blunted. It was still present, indeed, and to think of it was to rouse it again in something approaching its original force and bitterness. The change was apparent in the fact that I only thought of it now and then. I threw myself fiercely into my work. I took pride in doing more than other men could do, in riding faster and farther than other stockmen attempted to ride. The attempt to do more gave a special interest to my employment; and mere physical exertion was an anodyne to my mind and saved me from brooding on the maddening past.

Yes, and there was something else. In my hours of

loneliness I was no longer quite alone. As I rode, a face floated before me so vividly that I could almost see it with my bodily eyes: soft, golden-brown hair shadowing a smooth white brow and a pair of large grey eyes,—eyes that were so calm, and yet so full of pity and of sympathy that the vision of them brought a strange moisture to my own. There was the charm of youth, of freshness, and of beauty of no common sort in the face, but it was the innocent purity of that brow and the tender sympathy of those eyes that haunted me by day and made my dreams by night. It is strange, but in a sense I was happier. Often and often, when my bitter fate and the burning consciousness of wrong and injury swelled my heart and made my eyes blaze with resentment, that face would come between, and, like a vision from a better world, would gradually efface the burning sense of disgrace and the gnawing desire of revenge. Was this love? I never asked myself—nay, I never even thought of the question. For me it was enough to worship those eyes and to live under the soft spell of that face. A dream of possession would have seemed to me then a desecration. If it was love, it was the love of a devotee to the Virgin,—a passion, indeed, but a passion that had little or nothing of earth about it.

I went on with my work, and the weather showed no sign of change. Day after day the same golden river of sunshine was poured without abatement on the already burned and heated earth. Day after day not a sign of moisture in the air, no hope of relief from the dry and stifling atmosphere. By the middle of March water was scarce anywhere; by the end of the month it was scarcely obtainable for the cattle. Of course the work grew harder and more anxious.

Even the horses felt it now, and except Fireking not one of the stockmen's beasts was in good working condition. It may have been the result of old prejudices, or it may have been some strange forecast of the future that made me anxious about my own horse, but through it all he at least was well cared for. Whatever was neglected, Fireking never was. Whatever beast went without food, or had short allowance of water, he at least was well provided for. And he fully repaid my care. Whether, according to his name, he really had some affinity for heat, I cannot say, but he certainly thrived in it. While other horses looked wretched and grew weak, Fireking had never before seemed so vigorous or so powerful as he did now.

On the 8th of April—while I live I am not likely to forget that date—I had come in to the overseer with my report of the cattle on my side of the run. Insensibly I had gained a surly kind of confidence from this man. No reference was ever made between us to the past, no advance to anything like friendliness for the future. He was a shrewd, hard-headed though coarse sort of man, and he knew when he was well served. I was now doing the work of two men at a time when the work was specially severe, and he knew it.

“All right, Jenkins,” he said, when I had given him all the information he wanted. “Is your horse pretty fresh? But I see he is. How do you always manage to keep him in such a condition?”

“I take good care of him. A good horse always pays for that.”

“Well, I wish you would teach these confounded boundary riders the trick, then, for if this goes on we won't have a horse fit to ride directly. Here's Dick's

horse knocked up on the other side the range, and the beasts off into the big scrub."

"You want me to go and give a hand, I suppose?" I said, quietly, as he stopped, for of course he knew he was asking a good deal from a man who did as much on his own side as these two fellows did on their side.

"Yes," he said, a little sulkily; "yes, I think you had better go over and give them a hand, for if these beasts get well into that scrub there isn't a drop of water, and I hear the blacks have been seen on the other side."

"All right. I suppose Jack's gone on with a fresh horse?"

"Yes, about an hour ago. I expect you'll catch him up on this side of the range. By the by," he added, as I was riding off, "Captain Malcolm's gone up that way; I fancy you don't much care about meeting him, so you can look out."

I waved my hand to him, and rode off.

It had been an exceedingly close, oppressive day. Even with all the experience I had lately had of hot weather, this day was exceptional. It was intensely hot, but it was not bright. There was a heavy feeling in the stagnant air, a misty appearance in the blue sky, which were new to me. As I rode away I wondered what they meant and whether they were the forerunners of a change. Then my thoughts went back to Captain Malcolm, and I hoped I should avoid meeting him. This man was not only distasteful to me; I was conscious of a feeling towards him that came short of perfect hatred only because it came so near to contempt.

I was less anxious to overtake Jack the stockman than to spare Fireking, who had already travelled some distance, so I didn't hurry, but rode slowly on, en-

grossed with my own thoughts, and I found myself mounting the range before I had noticed how far I had come without overtaking him. Like most ranges in the district, this one was of no great height. The apparently level but really undulating country, of which most of the run consisted, was here upheaved into a low irregular range, forming a watershed perhaps two hundred feet high. The higher ground was generally rugged, and was covered with scrubby forest and brushwood, with here and there a tall old gum, looking gaunt and solitary as it soared above the rest. The land on either side ran down in low spurs, which fell away into gullies where there were streams in winter and water-holes as a rule in summer, and out of which grew grey gum-trees with an undergrowth of the dismal black wattle.

I glanced round me and saw that I was ascending the slope between two of these gullies, following a well-defined cattle-track. I noticed also that the sun was beginning to slope towards the west, showing that it was between three and four o'clock, so I shook the rein and spoke to Fireking, who responded by breaking at once into a sharp canter. In another ten minutes or so we had reached the top of the slope, and then I pulled up, as I was no longer sure of my track. The ragged bush around me was high enough to prevent my getting a good view, but I chose the track which appeared to have been most used, and cantered on. The breeze was strong now and was increasing. It blew directly in my face, but it brought no relief from the stifling heat. On the contrary, it seemed to make matters worse. The air at rest on the home side of the range had been sultry and heavy: the air in motion was like the blast from a furnace; it scorched as it

blew. I looked anxiously at the sky. It was still of the same faded-looking blue color, with a hazy film over it which made it look grey. There was not a cloud, so there was no motion overhead. I rode on.

The range sloped more abruptly on the side I had now reached, and I was soon on the level land again. Then the scrub which had covered the higher ground gave way and I was once more in the open. I pulled up and looked about me. The breeze had already freshened into a high wind and bade fair to freshen to a gale. Already the trees creaked and bent before it and the tall scrub swayed and rustled. Still the wind was hot and painful to the eyes, and even its strength seemed to impart no coolness to it. I shaded my eyes to get a better view. The first thing I saw appeared to be two horsemen. As they came nearer I could see that one was a lady. They were riding at an easy canter. I rode steadily on. I knew—how could I fail to know?—who it was. In five minutes we were close together, and as we passed I looked at her. We were quite close, and she smiled and nodded to me in a friendly way as we passed. The captain was at her side, but I never saw him. The one thing of which I was conscious was the smile that lit up her dark eyes and clothed her bright face with sunshine. I rode on without thinking of anything else. I was roused by Fireking. He stopped suddenly. The shock brought me back from dreamland, and I looked round me once more. What was this? The wind blew strongly in my face, and was as hot as ever, but now it brought with it more than heat. There was a curious smell in the air—a strange biting sensation in the touch of the wind. It was the smell of fire. The horse had recognized it and had stopped; his instinct was far in ad-

vance of my knowledge. It was not for nothing that he had his name. For the moment I felt bewildered. Of course I had heard of bush fires—they are the stock subjects for the yarns of old hands in the bush—but I had never seen one. What should I do? The fire must be in the scrub before me, and it was into that scrub that the cattle had strayed. My first instinct was to go on. I followed my instinct: I tightened the rein and touched Fireking with the spur. For a moment he resisted. For a moment I thought he would refuse. But no! The instinct of obedience was the leading instinct, after all. He snorted uneasily, tossed his head impatiently, and then broke into a hasty gallop.

Where were the stockmen? If I could but find them, I still thought, in my ignorance, we might do something. If I could not, even my inexperience warned me that I was only running into useless danger. I “coo-ee” loudly as I went; but no answer came back. The hot blast of wind hurled the sound in my face, and I was not surprised. It was growing serious. The gale was rising fast, and the blast was hotter and more scorching than ever. The smell of fire, too, grew pungent in my nostrils and painful to my eyes, and already the sky was becoming obscured by great eddying wreaths of smoke. I pulled up Fireking, and once more tried the effect of a “coo-ee,” given with all the force of my lungs. I listened, but no answer came back, only a sort of distant moan, which might have been the wind, but seemed to my imagination to be the voice of the fire. I wheeled the horse reluctantly and rode back along the track by which I had come. I did nothing to rouse the horse, but he required no urging now. As I wheeled him he broke into a sharp

canter. In a very few seconds he exchanged the canter for a gallop. He was afraid of the fire. He was afraid, and he was right. Suddenly a blast of wind struck my cheek, and it seemed to burn me. I glanced hastily over my shoulder, and I, too, grew alarmed. The atmosphere behind me had undergone a change. There was smoke still—more, indeed, than ever, but now it rolled in huge black billows before the gale. And the smoke was not all black. Here and there it was lit up by a fierce lurid glow, and now and then out of the blackness there darted a deep crimson flash of fire. It was coming.

Up to that moment I had no thought of danger. Even now the danger of which I thought was not my own. It was hard, indeed, to fancy danger that could reach me on a horse so powerful and swift as the one I rode. But now I shuddered.

It was but a few minutes since I had met the captain and Miss Malcolm, and even now they might not understand their danger. At the thought I touched Fireking hastily with the spur and urged him to a quicker gallop.

We were mounting the slope at last, although to my excited fancy it seemed an age before we reached it. Only a very few minutes could have passed, and already matters had awfully changed for the worse. The hot blast of the desert was already charged with the fierce breath of the furnace. Already the afternoon sky was blotted out by a dense haze of smoke, and the wreaths of the same that curled and eddied before the gale, made everything dim and indistinct to the sight.

I was growing keenly alive to the danger at last, and I urged Fireking up the slope as fast as it was prudent to go. As I went I peered anxiously in front of me

and listened so eagerly for the sound of horses' hoofs that the exertion became a positive pain. How far had she got on ahead? Would the horses keep the track in the bewildering smoke and haze around them? Would her own strength and the strength of her horse hold out long enough to secure safety? Question after question rose in my mind and pulsed wildly through my brain. And still I peered around me through the lurid shadows, and listened tremblingly for the dreaded sound of her flying hoofs. Suddenly I was conscious of a new sensation: it flashed through my brain in a moment, and in the same moment sent the hot blood coursing wildly through my veins. Till that instant Miss Malcolm had been to me a dream—almost an abstraction. Till then she had seemed to me an angel of goodness and pity, indeed, but much more of an angel than a woman. I had dreamed of her, revered her, worshipped her at a distance; but of ordinary human emotion there had been none that was conscious. In this one moment of deadly peril all this was changed. It was not for an angel that I felt this wild terror, but for a woman in danger. It was no longer for a being to be worshipped at a distance, but for a woman to be protected in her weakness, saved from danger, if need be, died for in the last extremity, a woman wildly if hopelessly loved, that I was in fear for at the moment. Self-revelation is always a sudden thing, and I knew all this in a moment. Life and death seemed now to hang for me on her safety. I galloped wildly forward.

Behind me came the smoke and the flames borne on the wings of the gale, which now roared and howled among the giant gums, and bent the smaller trees like reeds in its path. And as it came it grew louder and

louder. There was a hiss and a crackle and a yell behind me distinct from the voice of the wind in the trees, and a solemn roaring noise that swelled louder and louder like the diapason of a mighty organ. I could hardly see for the eddying smoke, but my horse either saw or by instinct followed the track. At last we had reached the top of the range. I knew it by Fireking's stride rather than by sight, for seeing had become both vague and painful. Yet for the moment I half turned to look back. It was but for an instant, for the heat was more than I could bear. But the sight of that roaring phlegethon, that mighty rushing sea of flames, is with me still. Awful in its lurid beauty, more awful in what it concealed than in what it showed, it seemed to me as if I were already overtaken. Vast tongues of crimson flame, blurred and blotched with blackest wreaths of smoke, stretched themselves hungrily towards me. From tree-top to tree-top they leaped and sprang like fiery demons, hissing, shrieking as they flew. And ever behind them came rolling the billows of the sea of fire and the voice of the tempest of flame. Wildly I struck the horse with the spur, and galloped on.

Suddenly I heard a shout. I looked in the direction of the sound, and through the smoke I could just make out the shadow of a horse and a man behind him. The cry was wild and hoarse, yet it was barely audible amid the gathering sounds around and before me. I drew rein to the left as if by an instinct, and with a few wild bounds Fireking took me to the spot. It was they.

Both were at the moment dismounted. Miss Malcolm stood looking at her horse, which had fallen over a log and now lay still, as if badly injured. The cap-

tain was at his horse's head, and the horse was already wildly restive through terror. As I reached him I could see terror also in the man's white face and in his wildly staring eyes.

"Help!" he shouted, as I came up. "For God's sake, help!"

In an instant I had thrown myself from the saddle and was by his side.

"Hold my horse!" I shouted, "and I will move Miss Malcolm's saddle to yours. There is time yet. He will carry her clear."

The man shrank from me as if I had struck him. He glared at me and all the cruelty of fear was in his eyes.

"And I?" he stammered. Then in a moment he recognized me, and even in his terror the base nature of the man asserted itself.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, wildly. "Give Miss Malcolm your own horse! Yours! What right have you to him or to anything else? Give him up, I say!" and he stretched out his hand and made a clutch at Fireking's bridle.

"Coward!" I hissed the word at him through my clenched teeth. "Coward, did you think I meant to leave your worthless carcass to the fire if my horse could carry us both?"

As I spoke the fire came on. With a hiss and a roar it sprang upon a huge old gum-tree that towered almost over our heads, and the blazing leaves and twigs fell around us in a fiery shower. His horse struggled wildly to get free, and, with a cry, "I can never hold the brute!" he managed to scramble into the saddle once more. As he did so the horse sprang forward. Had he tried, I don't know that he could have held the terrified animal, and I don't know that he made the

attempt. As he went he looked back at me, shook his fist, and shouted, "Give your master's daughter the horse, you scoundrel!"

I turned to Miss Malcolm. Her face was very pale, and her lips moved, but she was calm even in that moment of dreadful peril.

"Come!" I said, "Miss Malcolm; it is not quite too late yet."

She drew back. "No!" she said. "No! I will not throw away your life, too. I know you cannot save me; save your own life!"

"Never!" The word sprang from my lips with an energy so fierce that even in that terrible moment I thought she could hardly fail, being a woman, to understand it. "Never! Miss Malcolm, trust me. Come with me—for God's sake, come! I will save you yet; if not, I can die here."

She looked me straight in the face. What she read there I cannot tell, but I thought—it may only have been a fancy—that a faint flush relieved the paleness of her cheek at the moment.

"I trust you."

It was all she said, but she stretched out her hand. As woman to man she gave it to me; as man from woman I accepted that sacred trust.

In a moment I had remounted; indeed, it all passed in the space of a very few seconds. I had stooped and grasped her hand. With quick perception she stepped upon the fallen tree that had proved fatal to her horse, and by a single motion I landed her on the saddle before me.

To clasp her firmly with my arm, to loosen the rein, and to strike Fireking sharply with the spur was the work of an instant, and once more the gallant horse

resumed the struggle for life. Thank God! he was strong and fresh still. Seldom has a horse fought so stern a fight with the elements. Seldom have human beings escaped a peril so awful and so imminent.

Through the lurid air and the driving wreaths and billows of smoke; amidst the falling branches and the hail of fiery leaves, surrounded by the howl of the tempest and the hissing of the devouring flames—through all we struggled on.

These were awful moments, but description becomes impossible. The raging confusion of sounds, the maddening sensation of heat and struggle, the bewildering and stifling smoke and flame on every side, leave but a general impression of weird and ghastly horror like the vision of pandemonium. Through it all I was clearly conscious of one thing alone,—I held her in my arms! Her fainting head leaned on my breast. Her pale, beautiful face was close to mine. What mattered the storm and the danger; the flying flames, and the blinding smoke? If we escaped, I should have saved her, if we perished, we should perish together. I bent over her unconscious form. I warded off the falling leaves and twigs that eddied round us, shrivelling and blazing, in a giddy dance of death. I clasped her more and more tightly to my breast; with clenched teeth and blinded eyes I galloped wildly on.

How it happened I do not know, and I never shall know, but suddenly I could see once more. By some heaven-sent instinct the horse must have changed his course and crossed the line of the fire. Suddenly, unexpectedly, incomprehensibly, we found ourselves outside of it, the gale blowing strongly on our left side; and behind us, howling and hissing and roaring as before, the great river of fire swept past.

I looked round for a moment bewildered and almost stupefied, then I looked down at the still unconscious face pillowed against my breast. Her hat was broken, her veil burned and torn to pieces. One soft curl had straggled across her pale cheek and brow. A great sob of thankfulness burst from my heart and gave me relief. "Thank God!" I ejaculated. Then I stooped—reverently, tenderly, almost sadly—I stooped and kissed her brow.

The danger was passed. The good horse had conquered in the struggle. Fireking had once for all vindicated his name. We were safe. As soon as I could see anything clearly, I saw that the home station would escape. The gale was carrying the fire away to the westward, and it was so strong that only slowly and with difficulty could the flames manage to creep up against it in places through the dry brown grass.

I turned Fireking's head towards the house, and he dropped first into a canter and then into a walk. I was in no hurry to get home. I was in just as little hurry to see my beautiful burden recover consciousness. While the faint lasted I could clasp her to my breast. While she knew it not, I could still feast my eyes on her pale face and wildly dream that it was possible those closed eyes could open and give back an answering look to mine.

It could not last. The strong wind, hot although it still was, gradually revived her. She moved; she opened her eyes; she looked up. Surprise, wonder, and then returning recollection chased one another in quickly varying expressions over her face. Then a quick crimson blush spread over her cheek and brow as she hastily tried to raise herself.

"Thank God, Miss Malcolm,"—I almost whispered the words,—“thank God, you are safe!”

For a moment she said nothing, and her eyes half closed again. Then she looked up, and her eyes were full of strong feeling, which made them shine and glisten as I had never seen eyes shine before.

"Thank God!" she repeated. "Yes, and thank you, too. I trusted you, and you were more than worthy of my trust. Thank you for my life."

I looked at her, but tears that would come blinded my eyes. I tried to say something, but I felt that I should sob if I tried to speak. I looked away.

"Couldn't I dismount now?" she said, after a moment's pause.

"Certainly, Miss Malcolm," I replied. "If you are able to walk, perhaps it will be as well."

Her words had recalled me to myself again. The dream of the last few minutes was at an end already.

Carefully I dismounted and helped her gently from the saddle. Then, leading Fireking, I accompanied her in silence. More than once I could see her glance secretly at me, and then turn away again. She had nothing to say. Good heavens! What could she say to me? The bitterness had come back again—the iron again entered my soul. I walked beside the woman I loved and worshipped, and I—I was a leper, a convict! What could there be to say?

We saw nobody. Every man on the station had, no doubt, gone to help in the effort to save the farm buildings away to the right, and we approached the house unobserved. At last we reached the gate of the home paddock, but a few chains distant from the house. I opened it for her to pass through, and then I paused. She passed through, and then looked round at me inquiringly.

"Good-bye," I said, in a voice which I knew was hoarse and broken. "Good-bye, Miss Malcolm. God bless you!"

The last words broke from me as if in spite of myself. Even to my own ear they sounded like a cry of pain. She turned back hastily, and came towards me. Her face was troubled, her lips trembled, her large eyes filled with unshed tears.

"Oh!" she said, and her voice also was tremulous with feeling, "you don't think me ungrateful? You don't believe I can ever forget?"

She stretched out her right hand to me and I took it in mine. I struggled to speak, but no words would come. I bent down and kissed her hand. Wildly, hungrily, despairingly, I kissed it. Then I let it go.

She turned hastily away. When I looked up again she was gone.

I closed the gate slowly. I felt somehow as if I were shutting out hope. I also turned away. I went towards the huts.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHY I went to the huts, I don't know. It was weeks since I had taken a meal there, and I had not slept there since I began my new life with Joe. I have often asked myself why I went there on this particular day: I have never received from my own mind an answer. Is it strange? Can we give reasons for most of the things we do which lead to important results? Do not the hinges of life turn for the most part without noise?

The huts were entirely deserted. The summons of the fire had evidently reached them all, and the urgency of the danger had left no loiterers behind. Fireking followed me with his head drooping as if over-exertion had exhausted his energy. I glanced round me, and, seeing Tom the hut-keeper's supply of water, I placed it before the horse and watched him as he drank it greedily. Then I left him standing and went into the hut. Its sordid appearance was no worse than usual, yet it somehow struck me more. With a feeling of sickening despondency I leaned against a bunk feeling rather than thinking of the vast gulf that yawned between Miss Malcolm and myself. Her face rose before me with its unmistakable air of refinement and high breeding. And this—this was my sphere. This was the place, and this the life, to which I was condemned. And yet I knew, at least I believed, that my love could have thrown a bridge over many a gulf, such as might in the ordinary course of things have separated us. I could have overcome poverty, conquered

position, name, and fame, by the mere force of my affection, and could have distanced many a competitor for her favor. But this! Not even the abyss across which the rich man's hungry eyes were fixed on Lazarus could surely have seemed more hopelessly impassable than this.

For a moment I broke down, and strong spasms of convulsive sobbing shook my body like an ague fit. Was it unmanly? It may have been, but at least it was natural, and there are times when nature is a despot. I was suddenly brought back to myself, and it was a little thing that roused me. In my agony I leaned heavily against the rough bunk, and my ear caught the sharp metallic clink of something in the bed. It was nothing very extraordinary, and yet it startled me. There are times when the tension of the feelings seems to lend special vividness to the senses, and now I seemed to distinguish something suspicious in the sound I had heard. I turned to the bunk and examined it. It was the one occupied by Long Jim, I knew, and showed nothing on the top but a frowzy blanket and a heap of mingled straw and ferns that formed his rude substitute for a bed. Hastily I thrust the blanket aside and groped among the straw beneath. My hand touched something; it was smooth and cold. I knew it at once for a gun-barrel.

I paused to think. The men had got arms at last! How many I did not know; but even in this one bed certainly more than one, from the sound I had heard—and almost certainly more elsewhere. They were armed. I knew what that meant. It was the beginning of the end. Three months ago the men waited only for weapons; now they had got them. I leaned breathlessly against the bunk. A thousand thoughts

hurried through my mind. A thousand half-forgotten feelings boiled up in my heart and surged hotly through my brain. The revenge for which I would have sold myself once was now offered me; the retribution I had invoked so fiercely was evidently impending. And now—now I was only stunned and bewildered.

Slowly I recovered myself and left the hut. I seemed to require air and space fully to realize the discovery I had made and its possible consequences. Fireking stood where I had left him, and I once more hitched his bridle over my arm and walked slowly away. No one was in sight. The fire had passed on, and the dense clouds of smoke that still hung over the run to the westward marked the course of the destroyer. The foreground was scathed and blackened by its passage, but at least it had passed us by without very serious damage.

I led the horse towards the farm buildings, and had got within a hundred yards of them when I heard shouts from beyond. I looked and saw several men running towards me. I could scarcely recognize them, they were so grimed and blackened with smoke; but as they came near I saw that Pinnock the overseer was one. As soon as he recognized me he beckoned wildly, and I mounted Fireking once more and rode on to where he stood waiting breathlessly.

He looked pale and ghastly in spite of the smoke which went far to blacken his face, and as I came up he shouted, "For God's sake, Jenkins, ride over to the colonel; he's almost distracted about Miss Malcolm." As he spoke he pointed to the left, where I could see figures hurrying along the edge of the burnt ground towards the range.

"All right," I shouted, in reply, and roused Fireking once more into a canter.

As I came up the colonel turned to meet me. There was something terrible in the old man's stern fixed face, in which fear and horror were struggling against the self-control of years. I had, as heaven knows, little enough cause to like or to pity this man. Yet I was conscious of a strange sensation of pity at my heart, and a stranger feeling of softening and interest as I looked at him.

For a moment he gasped in the vain effort to speak; then he regained control of his voice.

"My daughter, Jenkins, and the captain! Have you seen anything of them?"

"Your daughter is safe, sir; and the captain should be; but I don't know anything about him."

He stared at me as if hardly comprehending for some seconds, then he exclaimed,—

"Safe, did you say, Jenkins? Safe? How? The captain's horse has come home, and he is scorched." Then he stopped and looked at me eagerly and helplessly. Looking in his face now, I saw the likeness to his daughter at last.

"Miss Malcolm is safe, sir. I saw her go up to the house not long ago. The captain must have been thrown. We had better look for him."

The shock and the anxiety must have unnerved him, for he followed my lead. I heard him mutter in a low tone, "God be thanked!" Then he turned his face again towards the range. So, without another word, side by side we went in search of the captain.

We found him at last. He had almost escaped the danger which had filled him with such terror. He had cleared the bush successfully, and had even reached the foot of the range on this side, when, probably blinded and confused by the smoke and flames, his

horse had put his foot in a hole and then thrown him over his head. His arm was broken, but still he had tried to drag himself out of the way of the fire. He had been overtaken and terribly burned, however, before he got clear, and now he lay insensible upon the scorched and blackened soil—his face black and burnt—his clothing scorched and torn. His desertion had cost him dear. The men gathered round him, and even from some of them there were expressions of pity. For my part I felt like a stone. For this man I had no pity ; towards him I was hard and unfeeling still.

Insensible as he was, they lifted him from the burnt earth, and carried him slowly towards the house. I felt neither sympathy nor anxiety for him, and I pretended none. I wheeled Fireking away and went back to the farm buildings. I dismissed the captain from my mind. His crime and its punishment seemed nearly balanced, so I thought no more about him. I returned once more to my discovery at the huts. As Fireking paced slowly back to the stable the question came vividly before me. It was not the question of the meaning of the presence of fire-arms, for of that I was not in doubt for an instant. It was not a doubt of the fate that threatened the colonel and his family. I remembered too well the fiercely whispered threats of men smarting with pain, and unfettered by one finer feeling of humanity to balance the suffering, to doubt what that was. The question was not what, but when. Imagination could and did fill in the details of the impending tragedy only too faithfully ; the time alone remained in doubt.

Why had I heard nothing of it ? It was true I had not been living at the huts, but I often saw the hut-

keeper, and not unfrequently others. Yet not a syllable had reached me on the subject. For some reason it had been intentionally concealed, and the reason could only be that they did not care to trust me. Yet I felt that I must know, for Miss Malcolm's sake. For the fate of the colonel I confess I felt but little anxiety, for that of the captain none at all. The bitter hatred and the wild desire for vengeance against the colonel, indeed, had grown dull and blunted, and the fierce sensations of mingled hatred and contempt I had felt for the captain had now become almost wholly contempt. Still I was conscious of no anxiety about them; their life or death scarcely entered my mind at all.

How would it affect Miss Malcolm? That was the one thought which now filled my mind with an agony of apprehension. The old shock which months before had overcome me in the time of my lowest mental degradation at sight of her, when I knew her only for a woman, and thought of her only as defenceless and exposed to a horrible peril, came back upon me now with tenfold intensity. I must know. At any cost I must rescue her once more—this time from a danger more appalling than the flames.

These, and a hundred other thoughts, and—shall I confess it?—in spite of everything, hopes, crowded upon my mind as I slowly walked Fireking back to the stables. It was almost dark by the time I had put him in and attended to him, and by that time my mind was fully made up. Through the gathering darkness I walked back to the huts. I noticed that the sky was heavily overcast. Far away to the northeast there was the pale gleam of lightning below the horizon, and I could just fancy I heard the low growl of distant thunder creeping along the ground.

There was a light in our hut; and as I came near I could hear voices in angry discussion. Through the open door I could make out Tom the hut-keeper moving about the fireplace getting supper, while the others were either lying in their bunks or seated on the blocks of wood that served as seats, smoking their pipes. The red glow from the blazing fire lit up the interior brightly, and threw out into wild relief the faces and figures of its inmates. It was the voice of Long Jim that caught my ear, saying, angrily,—

“Come, now, Tom, just stop your jaw, I tell ye, and look lively with that tucker. What the —— you wanted draggin’ you old carcass after the fire instead of mindin’ your own work, I don’t know. For anything you know some sneakin’ devil may have been here overhaulin’ the traps!”

“Oh, never you fret your —— inside about that, Long’un. There ain’t nobody been round here; and if there was, what do ye think he’d be the wiser?”

“Well, I don’t know as it matters a —— heap now, if he did,” replied Jim, with a low growling sort of chuckle that was echoed from more than one quarter of the hut.

The words, and still more the hideous laugh that followed them, sent a cold shudder down my spine, and involuntarily I held my breath, as I crept a little nearer in the darkness. There was a pause for a few seconds, broken only by the sharp crackling of some light wood which Tom had thrown on the fire. It was another voice that spoke next.

“It was lucky we got rid of that —— captain so easy. He won’t give any trouble now.”

“Not much,” said Jim; “but look here, mates, what’s come of the gal? She went out with him over the range, they tell me.”

"She's right, mate! Not as it matters to her very much, p'raps."

"How the devil do you know that, Bill?" It was Jim that spoke, and I could hear him raise himself in his bunk in his anxiety for the answer.

"I heard the Gentleman tell the old man, mate. 'Your daughter's safe,' says he; 'I saw her go up to the house.' And with that the —— old Turk, says he, 'God be thanked for that!'" and the speaker laughed a short laugh.

"Oh, that's it, is it? Saw her, did he? Saved her, more likely! But it don't signify, mates, so long as she's there. If we've got to take to the bush, some of us'll want a wife."

I had listened to it all, and I had been able to keep silence. It had taxed my powers to the utmost, however. The words, the tones, the diabolical oaths, and the still more diabolical laughter, had almost maddened me. I grew hot as fire and cold as ice by turns. My limbs trembled, and great drops of perspiration gathered thickly on my brow, and yet I did not stir. Was it possible that I had ever sympathized with creatures like these? Was it conceivable that men like these counted me for a comrade, and perhaps looked to me for assistance in their plans of devilish violence?

The conversation died away, and I could hear Tom putting out the tin plates and pannikins for the meal. Should I creep away and escape from the foul neighborhood? No, for as yet I knew nothing of their plans, not even the time when they meant to act. Without this knowledge all else might be useless. I crept slowly and cautiously away to some distance. Then I turned and walked back. I made as much noise as I could in doing so. I even whistled a few

bars of an old operatic tune which curiously seemed to come to my lips at the moment. They heard me. The sound of voices in the hut ceased. Then a voice I recognized as Tom's said, "Speak of the devil! D—d if here isn't the Gentleman himself." In another moment I stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I STROOPED and went in. I could feel that I was not welcome. The usual greeting, "Well, mate!" came from one or two, but it came from none of them heartily. I was not wanted, and they hardly cared to conceal it. Fortunately I was not surprised. I was able to act as if I didn't see it. With a careless "Good-evening, mates!" I looked round me for a seat. There was an unoccupied block in the corner, and I drew it forward and sat down. My companions looked at me, but they said nothing. Even Tom had suddenly grown quiet. Without a word he poured tea into a pannikin and handed it to me. He passed me a tin plate and pointed to the mutton.

Then my companions began to talk again—to talk faster and louder than was quite natural, as if to make up for the silence. I could feel that they were nervous, and I knew that it was my presence that made them so. I was right then in my suspicion—they would not trust me. What was to be done? Fortunately I had never talked much in their company, and I was not expected to talk much now. I ate my mutton and damper as well as I could, and drank my tea in silence, and as I did so a hundred wild schemes jostled one another in my brain. The rest talked on. I was conscious of the fact, but scarcely conscious of what was being said. I was trying to think out some plan by which I could learn their intentions, but for the moment I seemed to have lost the power of thinking consecutively. I tried to fix my mind on the circumstances,

and to balance the chances, but my mind refused to obey me. It was my companions that relieved me of my difficulty at last. It was Long Jim himself who suggested the right course for me to pursue. I was still lingering over my supper and staring abstractedly into my half-empty pannikin, almost in despair of any idea, when he addressed me—

“I say, mate, you must have had a sharpish ride!”

I looked up at him, only half understanding, and nodded.

“Damned if he ain’t three parts asleep, mates!” he continued, looking round at the others with a significant glance.

The idea flashed upon me in an instant. It was the answer to my puzzle. It might—nay, it was sure to be—dangerous, but that was nothing. I must contrive to sleep in the hut, and I might learn everything—in any case I would learn something.

“I think it’s the weather, mate,” I replied slowly. “It seems to me I can scarcely hold up my head.”

“More like the smoke and fire got in your brain. I’ve heard it often does: them bloody firemen often get that way.”

“Well, mate, it might be that; I can tell you it was both thick and hot. If it hadn’t been for Fireking I was finished.”

“Lucky job the stables weren’t burnt, then. I s’pose you’ve got him down there now?”

“Yes, but he’s pretty near knocked up. What with the struggle to get off, and the scorching he got, he’s like me to-night—he can’t hold up his head.”

“Well, mate, if I was you I’d go and have a good sleep—nothing like a sleep, they say. You’ll be all right by mornin’.”

"I think I will, mate. How's my bunk here? Any bed in it?"

"No. Leastways it's musty enough, if there is. I wouldn't try it if I was you. It's not been used these two months."

As he spoke I glanced at him, and could see by his face he was really anxious to get me away. What was to be done? Of course I had a right to stay if I liked, but if I seemed bent on it they would be sure to suspect. To be suspected might be death, but in any case it would mean failure.

I got slowly on my feet and stretched myself. Then I stumbled across to my old bunk, and found there was hardly any bedding in it, and what there was was musty and old. It would require a good excuse for insisting on sleeping there. I knew the others were watching me, though they still talked among themselves. Slowly and reluctantly I turned towards the door.

"Well," I said, "I suppose I must tramp it, mates, if I don't fall asleep on the road."

"Not you," said Long Jim. "The fresh air'll wake you all right, when you're once outside."

I went to the door and opened it. It was not very light inside the hut; but outside it was darkness itself.

"Hallo!" I exclaimed. "It's dark enough outside, anyhow."

It was, indeed. The night was not simply dark—it was black. The air was not only wanting in any gleam of light; there seemed to be something solid and opaque, something one could grasp with his hand, or push against like a wall of darkness. The other huts were but a few feet off, and there must have been lights in each, but neither of them was visible through the thick darkness.

My exclamation brought both Tom and Jim to the door, and both peered out like myself into the dark. "Thunder," observed Tom, in a matter-of-fact tone. "Thunder, mates, and no mistake this time!"

"Thunder be d—d!" said Jim, emphatically. "It's only a bit dark, because our eyes are looking at the fire."

"A lot you know about it, my bantam!" rejoined Tom. "Mayhap you know all about Australy, my pippin, in six months, and mayhap you don't. Listen to that!" And as he spoke there came a long, low, distant growl which crept up to us through the darkness, and then seemed to roll away under our feet.

"It's thunder, I tell ye, and plenty of it! Not as it signifies much now," he added, in a lower tone, that came on me like a revelation.

"Well, mate," said Jim, hastily, "if it's going to thunder, you'd best be making tracks before it comes on."

"Tracks! but how can anybody find a track in this darkness?"

"That's true enough," growled Tom, in an undertone.

As he spoke he stepped outside into the darkness and tried to look around him. A great drop of rain as large as a half-penny struck him on the face with a kind of splash. He stepped back quickly.

"It's going to rain at last, mate: you'll have to stop."

I just caught the angry glance that Jim shot at the speaker from under his heavy brows, and then his face cleared.

"Well," he said, carelessly, "so much the worse for you, Gentleman. You've got no bed to lie on."

"That's a fact," I replied, as reluctantly as I could; "but anything's better than wandering about in darkness and rain like that, if it's a fair sample that hit Tom. Besides, I'm about dead beat now."

I turned from the door and went back to the bunk. It certainly was an uninviting bed, but I question if I ever viewed the best sleeping accommodation with so favorable an eye as I did that little heap of musty straw.

"Well," I said, slowly, "it's not nice, but I must make it do!"

Just as I was, I sat on the edge of the bunk to pull off my boots. I threw them into the bunk and myself after them.

"Good-night, mates! I don't much think the thunder will wake me."

My bunk was in the corner furthest from the fire, where I could best see without being seen, and I kept my eye on my companions. They looked at one another, and though the expression of their faces varied, annoyance was common to them all. I had made good my quarters in the hut for the night, and I had made them good against their will. Assisted by the storm, I had in some way disarranged their plans. So much as this could be seen at a glance. What would come of it remained to be seen, and was doubtful enough still. Thinking it over as I lay, I was fully conscious of my danger, but I could also see that the chances were in my favor. If they knew my object in being there, my life, I knew, would be sacrificed, but of course they did not know it. They did not trust me, but at present that was all. Three months ago—I shuddered at the thought—I would have joined such a plot, and they knew it. Three months sooner I would have sought revenge at the risk of blood on my hands and worse than blood on my soul. The feelings of these men were now what mine had been then, except that in their case there was nothing to restrain them from the worst,—no instincts of the gentleman still surviving in

the convict; no memories of another life fighting still, however feebly, against the degradation of this.

I closed my eyes, but between my nearly shut lids I watched them still. For a time they continued to talk as before. The same coarse jokes and coarser stories I had heard so often were repeated and laughed at with more or less heartiness. Yet from time to time I could perceive sharp glances cast into my corner as if to see whether I was still awake. Gradually—very gradually—for I knew these men were too suspicious to be easily deceived, I gave signs of being asleep. At first they produced no change, but gradually they had an effect. The jokes and stories were exchanged for more interesting subjects; the heads of the speakers drew more closely together, and they talked, cautiously indeed, but plainly, of their plans.

Fortunately my ears were good. Already a few great drops of rain had begun to fall on the roof, and the noise made it more difficult to catch what was said. Good as my ears had always been, they were never so acute as now, and I was able to gather the substance of all that was said.

The plan was simple, and terrible in its simplicity. The hands at Turner's were engaged in the plot also, and through them the fire-arms had been got. It was understood on both runs that the masters had no suspicion of their danger, and with twelve guns between the two parties they were certain of success. Turner and his overseer were to be the first victims, and then the hands were to come on to us. The plan of attack on the house was necessarily vague, as not one of the party had ever been near it; but they evidently thought that it mattered little. They had only to go up and shoot the colonel and his nephew, and all would go

well. It seemed only too likely! Thinking of it, as I lay, I could see no difficulty. Looking at it on every side, I could see no chance of escape but in flight. It was to be that night. This had been fixed long before the bush fire, and as it had not gone near Turner's place there was nothing in it to alter the arrangement. The heavy drops fell fitfully on the roof, but apparently more and more heavy. Minute by minute the long rolling peals of thunder came closer till the earth shook and trembled at each long report.

Still the conference lasted. Still the heads of the conspirators were bent closely together. The single candle had long since run and guttered away on the end of the table and gone out. Only by the gleams of the firelight, sometimes bright and then again dull, could I make out the figures of the men as they sat and whispered. Now and then a sharp glare of lightning, distant but yet bright, showed for an instant in the hut and cast a ghastly gleam over all. At last Long Jim rose with an oath.

"What time is it, old Tom, by your chronometer?" he asked, with a half laugh. "Strikes me it's nearly time."

"What, twelve o'clock? Not by chinks, my hearty!"

"Come, come, Tom! Your watch is slow, old man. What do you think, mates? Ain't it about time we started?"

There was a murmur of voices in discussion, but the natural impatience of men engaged in such an undertaking prevailed, and Long Jim's opinion was adopted.

"Anyhow, mates, I ain't agoin' to sit for a couple of hours in the rain to please any bloke's fancies. I'm on for the job, not for settin' round on the fence in a thunder-storm."

"Who asked ye, old man?" said Jim, anxious, apparently, to maintain good feeling. "Everybody knows sugar'll melt in the rain, so 'tis n't safe for you."

"Besides," he added, after a moment's pause, "besides, it will be just as well somebody gives an eye to 'my Gentleman' here, to see he don't wake too soon. I suppose he's asleep now." He rose hastily and looked suspiciously over to my corner.

"Oh, he's fast enough these two hours," observed Tom, apparently restored to good temper by Jim's good-natured chaff.

"Looked like it, didn't he, mate, afore he lay down?" said another of the party.

Jim, however, came over to the side of my bunk. He couldn't really see anything by the fitful gleams from the fire, but he had no real suspicion and was easily satisfied. He only glanced at me and then turned away again.

"Well, Tom, keep your eye on him, anyhow. Don't ever trust one of them bloody gentlemen, I say. Sell you like bullocks, they will, first chance they gets."

Tom nodded sulkily, as he replied, "Suspect too much is as bad as suspect none, I tell ye, Jim. But all the same, I'll keep an eye to him."

"Do ye. And if he wakes too soon, why, least said, soonest mended, Tom. You've got a knife, and, by all accounts, you know as well as most how to use it."

Once more Tom nodded. This time his face relaxed. The best of us are open to flattery, and the implied compliment pleased him.

"All right, mate," he said. "You leave him to me."

The men rose cautiously from their seats. Then they rummaged in various bunks and produced six guns. They were of various sorts. There were three

"Brown Besses," one older flint-lock, and two cavalry carbines, as nearly as I could make out in the uncertain light, and from the position in which I lay. One was put aside for Tom, and the others each took one. Then the ammunition was served out by Jim. Each man got his share in a flask, and each concealed it somewhere about his clothes.

"All ready, mates?" asked Jim.

"Aye, aye, mate!"

"Come along, then."

Jim opened the door, and the fitful firelight from within vainly tried to penetrate the dense darkness outside.

For a moment he stood in the door-way, then without a word he glided out into the night. One by one the others followed him. The darkness swallowed them up.

Tom shut the door behind them and sat down.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE heavy rain-drops had ceased to fall, and I heard, or seemed to myself to hear, the footsteps for some time as they gradually died away in the hushed and unnatural stillness of the night. Long after they were gone fancy still conjured up their echoes, and kept my nerves at the highest tension. Even when they had wholly ceased, fancy still conjured up reasons why they should return, and so render any movement of mine a disastrous failure. There was not a sound, however, except the soft dropping of the wood ashes in the chimney, or an occasional movement of old Tom, as he sat sullenly smoking by the fire. There was not much light, but what there was served to throw out his figure and face into high relief. It was a rugged face, seamed and worn with deep furrows of care and villany—a bad face, stern, hard, and obstinate. I looked at him now more narrowly than I had ever done before. We called him old, but he was still in the prime of life, not old enough to have lost any of the sturdy strength which showed in the broad chest and the great muscles of his arms and shoulders as he sat carelessly puffing slowly at his pipe.

How should I deal with this man? The butcher's knife, which, as cook, he carried in a sheath at his side, gave him a formidable advantage in a struggle, and one which his face as well as his words told me he would not hesitate to use. Easy as his attitude now was, I knew I should have little chance of taking him by surprise, and a struggle might at once bring him

help from an adjoining hut. Yet every moment was precious. It might be later than Tom had thought, and already the band from Turner's might be at hand. The thought caused a cold shudder to run through my limbs, and I moved involuntarily. The bunk creaked under my weight as I did so. The accident precipitated matters. At the sound Tom started and turned towards me at once. Then he rose, and after some search found a piece of candle and lighted it, never taking his eyes for more than an instant at a time off my corner of the hut as he did so. Then he laid his hand on the handle of his knife and half drew it from the sheath as he came towards me with stealthy footsteps. Involuntarily I closed my eyes and waited, seeing him dimly through the eyelashes as he came near me. I felt that he stood over me, though I dared no longer look. I was conscious of his hot breath on my face as he stooped close to examine me with the candle, and I had just presence of mind enough left to enable me to mutter something between my teeth. I did not think, and it was not by design I used it, but the name that sprung to my lips was "George!" I nearly started at the sound myself, but it was more than fortunate, it was providential. I felt Tom draw himself cautiously back. I could feel rather than hear that he drew a long breath. Then he muttered, "Poor devil! he's sound enough. I wonder who George is,—he always dreams about him."

Once more I ventured to look through my eyelashes. I watched his movements. He turned slowly away; slowly his hand was withdrawn from the knife. He was satisfied.

There was no calculation in it; it was purely a matter of impulse. As he turned from me my muscles

seemed to grow suddenly rigid, as though a fire ran through them. As he left me I knew that the moment for action had come. It was but a single motion, and I have not an idea how it was accomplished. In any less excited condition of nerve and muscle, it would have been impossible. By one silent movement I gathered myself together in the bunk. By a second I stood in the shadow behind him. With a start he turned, and the candle he held dropped to the floor and was extinguished. At the same moment I threw myself upon him.

As I had foreseen, he was no weak antagonist. Many a scene of danger and crime had made it no easy matter to surprise him, and I felt as I grappled breast to breast that I should need all my activity and strength to give me the advantage. With all his force he threw me off and made a clutch at the knife, uttering only one half-muttered oath of deadly import. His sudden effort had for the moment freed him sufficiently to enable him to grasp the knife, and I could see it gleam in the red glow of the fire-light as I gripped his wrist with a desperate strength which I felt to be like iron. By a sudden effort I twisted his arm across his throat, making him turn half round as I forced him backward by an irresistible pressure. He was left-handed, and as he slowly gave way he presented his brawny neck with its swelling veins and muscles. By another impulse, and without thought of consequences, I struck with my fist below the ear. I felt the man collapse as I did so, and with a stagger Tom fell like a log, with his head towards the fire, and the hand in which he held the knife still under him.

For a moment I stood looking at him and panting with the fierce exertion. Then I listened for some

sound of alarm from the neighboring hut, but all was silent. I went back to the bunk; I hastily put on my boots and cap. Then I returned and looked at Tom. He lay unconscious, but breathing heavily. I stepped across him as he lay and opened the door. It seemed darker than ever and the stillness was deadly. I paused for an instant to judge of the direction of the house. Then I closed the door silently. The last I saw of the hut was the red gleam of the dull chimney log glistening on the blade of the knife still clutched in Tom's nerveless hand. I closed the door. I plunged into the darkness of the night.

The distance was not very great; it was the darkness alone that made it formidable. Three times I missed my way, and discovered by coming either to a fence or the bank of the creek that I was wrong. The last time I almost despaired of finding it. Time was flying. To my excited fancy it seemed to be hours since I had started, and yet I seemed unable to find my way. In my excitement I began to run vaguely, wildly, and recklessly, and all the time I seemed to distinguish the footsteps of men in the darkness, and the muffled sounds of oaths and blasphemy behind me. I struck against a fence and stopped to take breath. I strained my eyes in the vain hope of seeing something in the darkness. I strained my ears in the equally vain attempt to hear.

It came without a warning. There was a dazzling blaze of blue fire which quivered and ran in long jagged streamers of lurid light, illuminating everything for an instant with a ghastly brilliance. It was followed instantly by a crash of thunder which seemed to tear the heavens to pieces, and to roll along the ground like an earthquake. I hardly noticed the thun-

der, for the lightning had shown me where I was. I stood within a few feet of the spot where I had last seen Miss Malcolm, and the house was not a hundred yards away.

To reach the gate, to run up the slope, to climb the garden fence was the work of a couple of minutes, and then I could faintly make out a light that twinkled dimly through the darkness. I made straight for the light, and in another instant I stood within a yard or two of a low window opening upon the garden, the lower part of which was thrown up, apparently to catch a breath of air. I paused and looked. The colonel was there, and he was alone. He sat at the table, his head leaning on one hand, looking at a letter that lay open before him. I could see that his face was furrowed and anxious-looking. Beside him on the table lay two pistols, evidently taken from the table drawer, which was still open.

"Sir," I exclaimed, in a low voice. In an instant he stood erect, facing the open window with one of the pistols presented.

"Who are you?" he demanded, sternly. "Advance another step and I shall fire."

"One of the hands, sir,—Jenkins. I have come to——" I answered, stepping as I spoke into the light from the window.

I was speaking when he pulled the trigger. I heard the report, and at the same moment I felt a sharp pain through my shoulder. With a single bound I sprang through the open window and grasped him by the arm before he could lay down the pistol that he held.

"Man!" I exclaimed, "are you mad? That shot may have proved the death-knell of all you hold dearest!"

He stared at me bewildered for a moment, and before he could speak the door was hastily opened, and Miss Malcolm ran into the room looking much alarmed, while I could see the frightened face of a servant looking anxiously through the open doorway.

"What is it, papa?" she exclaimed. Then, seeing me, she stopped, and the color rushed to her cheeks and brow. I stepped forward.

"Nothing to alarm you, Miss Malcolm," I said, as quietly as I could. "The pistol was discharged by an unfortunate accident, but luckily no harm has been done."

She looked at her father and then at me, and suddenly she grew pale.

"But you are hurt!" she exclaimed, "you are bleeding! Oh, papa, you have shot him, and only to-day he saved my life!"

I glanced at my arm, and for the first time noticed that the blood was dropping from my elbow to the floor.

"Oh, that is nothing, Miss Malcolm; a mere scratch, not worth mentioning at a moment like this. But, sir,"—and I turned to the colonel, who stared at me with a strangely bewildered expression which I couldn't understand. "But, sir, every moment is worth a lifetime now. Your life and more than that is at this moment in danger, in deadly peril. For God's sake rouse yourself and think what is to be done. In an hour, it may be in less, the hands will be here. You know——" here I lowered my voice almost to a whisper, "you know, sir, what that means."

He seemed suddenly to awake. He grasped me by the arm in his turn, and looked eagerly and incredulously in my face.

"And you!" he said, "and *you* have come to warn me, to save me? My God! Can it be possible?"

Miss Malcolm had stood looking first at one and then the other as we spoke. Now she came up to her father and, laying her hand on his arm, said, in a tone I shall never forget,—

"Trust him, papa! Whatever wrong you have done him in the past, trust him now. If we can be saved, he will do it."

She didn't look at me; she didn't speak to me. I was glad she did not. I don't know that I could have borne it if she had. Her simple faith in human nature overcame me. The colonel looked at me and shuddered.

"You don't know what you say," he muttered. "No! It can't be possible. Oh, God, it can't be possible!"

I looked the colonel in the face, and seemed to know by a sort of instinct what was passing through his mind. Then I spoke:

"It is possible, Colonel Malcolm. I don't say for your sake, but for your daughter's sake, it is possible. You know why I should hate, and why I have hated you almost to the death. Now you know why I have forgiven you. You may trust me!"

He gazed in my face and I into his for a moment, and then by an effort he recovered himself. "Tell me," he said, "how matters stand."

"The hands," I replied, "have got arms. They have gone to meet the hands from Turner's Run, then they will come here."

The colonel turned to the clock that stood above the fireplace; its hands pointed to half-past ten.

"How soon do you think they will be here?"

"Not before twelve o'clock; most likely, later, as the night is so dark."

He looked at me for a moment. The presence of danger had restored the old soldier to himself. The stern, alert look, which the habit of command in moments of danger gives, was once more the look in his eyes as he looked at me.

"Do you know Curtis's?" he asked.

"Yes; I have been there twice within the last month."

"Could you find your way there to-night?"

"I don't know. I could try."

"It is the only chance. A detachment of the mounted force will be there to-night. I have a letter to say so. If you could bring them in time, we are saved. If not—but you know what that means. Can you do it, and will you?"

"But," I said, eagerly, "but could you not escape?"

"No. Captain Malcolm is here, wounded and helpless. We could not possibly take him with us; we certainly shall not desert him."

I felt that he was right. Desperate as the risk was, I felt that it must be run. Contemptible as I knew the captain to be, I knew that he could not be deserted. Oh, that he had not escaped that afternoon!

"I will do it, colonel."

He looked at me steadily for a moment; then he stepped forward and held out his hand.

"If you should fail, don't come back; you will only lose your own life."

"I shall not fail, colonel, and I will come back."

"Succeed or fail, you have my thanks, Jenkins," he said. "You are a brave man, and you deserve to succeed."

I grasped the old man's hand which he held out to me. I glanced for an instant at his daughter's face, pale and yet calm. Then I turned and left the room as I had come in. I plunged again into the night.

CHAPTER XX.\

THE grasp of the old man's hand clung to me still. I certainly had no love for him, and nothing for which to thank him before. I felt as if I had now. For the sake of his daughter I could have forgiven him all, and unconsciously my bitter resentment had been ebbing away from me ever since I knew that she was his daughter. But it was for that hand-grasp I felt grateful. It was because he had at last looked me in the face as man looks in the face of his brother man in moments of peril. It was because by that one grip he seemed to me to have received me back again into the old fellowship of my kind.

As I ran down the garden path, vaulted over the fence, and made my way in the direction in which I believed the farm buildings lay, my heart beat high with the sense of self-respect restored. My blood coursed proudly through my veins once more like the blood of a freeman and a gentleman.

No task seems impossible in such a moment of elation. The world seems to lie at one's feet, and difficulties shrink to insignificance before the new-born energy of the soul. So, at least, it seemed to me. I could see where I was going now no better than before, yet by some instinct I went straight on my course without doubt or hesitation. Only a few minutes were consumed in reaching the stable. In the darkness I found the door. I found and saddled Fireking, and led him out. As I did so the blaze of the lightning and the mighty rolling crash of the thunder came again daz-

zling and almost stunning me for the moment. By that wild light I could see the house on the hill for a moment, and even the huts with the dark background of bush, and then all was darker than before.

I mounted Fireking, and, to my delight, I found that he had recovered his elastic motion. I turned his head to the right in a direction which I calculated would take me clear of the huts. I shook the rein and spoke to him as he broke into a quick canter, and brushed through the crisp dry grass which had that day escaped the fire.

It was a wild ride. I trusted almost wholly to my horse. From time to time, indeed, the whole heavens were lighted up for a second or two like a vast dome of ebony, glittering and flashing with a thousand streams of livid light, and then for a moment I guessed where we were, and tried to correct my course. On, on, we hurried, through the dense darkness and the blinding light. Deafened, almost staggered by the sudden crash of the thunder, and beaten and pelted by the huge raindrops that began to fall in sheets from the black clouds,—still we struggled on. It was for life or death. It was that and it was something more. I didn't think. I didn't dare to think. My senses were strained to their highest point of tension in the mere effort to proceed. If we should fail, if the horse should fall, if even we should miss the way, what then? I drove back the thought. I threw all my energy into the effort to see and to hear.

Surely the darkness had grown less black. There was a faint glow and then a stronger light, then a bright glare away to the left which I could not account for. Almost instinctively I drew rein to the left to see. Suddenly, through the blinding confusion of the rain it

burst upon me. Turner's place was on fire. The great red flames were shooting up into the black sky with a crackle and a roar which even the splash of the falling water could not do more than deaden. I pulled up the horse. I shaded my eyes with my hand and looked at the scene. There was where I had suffered the crowning degradation of my life; there was the veranda on which we had stood. The long tongues of flame were curling about its eaves and shrivelling the climbing plants that had covered it. There was the wood-house where I had shed tears of blood in my agony. The flames had burst through the roof and tossed and waved in the darkness like a blood-red flag. I looked, but I could see no one. Not a living soul was visible near the fire, not a human voice mingled with the roar of the flames.

The plot, so far as Turner's was concerned, had succeeded. The retribution had not failed to light on his head, at all events. Would it be so also with Colonel Malcolm? I wheeled Fireking to the right; I roused the good horse by a touch of the spur, and headed for Curtis's run.

It was a strange, fierce struggle with the elements. In the afternoon we had fought the fire; to-night we battled with the rain. It was not like rain, indeed. In solid sheets it poured on the long parched and sun-baked earth, with a heavy splash and a sharp rebound. To hear it, one would have supposed it to be hail; to feel it one might have fancied it almost anything rather than rain. Fortunately, it was on one side, or we could not have faced it. As it was, we often staggered and nearly lost our balance. Fortunately, we never did so altogether.

How long I had been riding I could not guess, for

my faculties had grown confused in the mere effort to concentrate them on the attempt to push on, when suddenly I heard a shout. It was close at hand, although in the rain it sounded dull and distant. I pulled the rein and rode towards the voice. In one minute I was up with the party.

"Who goes there?"

The voice was stern and peremptory, with the tone of military command. My heart gave a leap and stood still. Had I accomplished my task, after all? If so, would it be in time? "A messenger from Colonel Malcolm," I replied.

As I spoke I was among them. I could make out the erect forms of the troopers on their horses, and the figure of the officer who had hailed me in front.

"What is the message?"

"Hurry on, for God's sake, or you will be too late. The hands have mutinied. They have fire-arms. Turner's was burning as I passed, and ours would be next." I gasped it out in short broken sentences.

"Can you manage to light that lantern, Curtis?" said the officer. "Let's see this man before we go on."

A minute or two was lost in getting a light, while I waited in an agony of impatience. At last they managed it, and I could see the face of the officer. It was stern and white, but it had the look of determination that was wanted.

He held up the lantern to my face, then passed it down, examining my dress and horse.

"Ha," he said, "one of the hands! What's your name, my man?"

"Jenkins," I replied. "But for God's sake don't delay. Life and death and more than that hang on your exertions."

"Jenkins," he exclaimed. "Jenkins! Well, that is strange. But what do you mean by more than life and death hanging on us?"

"Oh, man, man," I almost shouted, "don't you see what it means? Men can die, but there are women, too—Miss Malcolm and others. For God's sake, hasten."

"Miss Malcolm," he replied. "Ah, that's true. He is right, men. We can but do our best; but that at least we must do. Is it any use going to Turner's now?"

"None, sir, none. As I passed it was a mass of flames and not a living soul could be seen."

"Well, then, forward, men! Curtis, you know the shortest way; lead on as fast as you can. You keep by me," he added. I wheeled Fireking. I was on my way back.

We did our best, but the progress of the party was slow—to me it was maddening in its slowness. Even Fireking, great as his exertions had been already, seemed to share my feelings, and I could feel that if released he would soon outstrip the troopers.

At last I begged to be allowed to go on and let the colonel know that help was coming; and after a moment's hesitation the officer said yes.

In an instant I had loosed the rein and touched Fireking with the spur. The noble animal sprang forward into the darkness. I didn't try to guide him now. I knew he would find his way home by the shortest track. On, through the blinding rain, lit up at times by the yet more blinding lightning, and re-echoing the rolling volleys of thunder. The water splashed high about us as we dashed forward; the ground was soaked and slippery under foot. We never paused. We never

drew rein; we never slackened our speed from the long stretching gallop into which Fireking had dropped almost at once when we left the party.

Suddenly the reports of guns to the right struck upon my ear. It must be the house at last, and it must be besieged. Once more I wheeled Fireking and galloped on.

At last he stopped. I thought I could make out a gleaming light before me and on higher ground. I could hear voices and the reports of guns and pistols close at hand. I threw myself from the horse, and in the darkness I made for the fence. I found it and crept through. Then I reached the garden fence and climbed over it. I paused to think. Caution was wanted now more than dash. I crept up towards the house through the shrubs and bushes. Then I stood for a moment to reconnoitre. It was well I did so. Just then a flash of lightning blazed out overhead and I saw within six feet of me a man as if on guard, with a carbine in his hand. It was but for an instant that I saw him, but it was enough. One spring and my hand was on his throat, while my other grasped the weapon he held. He tried to call out, but my fierce grip choked the attempt. He grappled with me, but in strength he would have been no match for me at any time, and now I seemed to have the strength of ten men in my muscles. In half a minute the struggle was over. In a minute I had wrenched the carbine from him with one hand and had choked him into unconsciousness with the other. Then I hurled him heavily to the ground and sprang on. I was close to the house and to the window by which I had already entered on that eventful night. The attack seemed to have been made at the back of the house and an entrance had evidently

been forced there, for the shouts and cries which I could now hear distinctly came from within.

I knew nothing of the house and could form but a vague idea of where the rooms lay; but, dulled as they were by the noise of the rain and muffled by being fired inside the house, I still made out that they were close at hand. I was now beside the window where I had seen the colonel. My hand rested on the outside shutter, roughly but strongly made in the Venetian form, which protected it. Could it be possible once more to reach them by the same road? At the thought I grasped the shutter, and felt it shake under the pressure of my hand. It was evidently fastened only in one place and probably by a very simple catch. Yet I hesitated. Once before I had nearly fallen a victim to my haste at this very spot, and the recollection, with the dull sensation of pain in my arm, warned me to be cautious. I bent forward and listened. Timber carries sound well, and with my ear pressed to the shutter I could hear what was going on inside. There was a sound of blows struck on wood and then a pistol shot, followed instantly by several shots from guns. The sounds were close at hand,—if not in this room, certainly in the next; yet still I hesitated.

There came another discharge, and then a cry—it was a woman's voice—and then a groan. I hesitated no longer. Sheltering the carbine as best I could from the rain, I grasped the shutter with both hands and setting my knee to the wall I wrenched it from its fastenings, and nearly fell backward as it swung suddenly open in my hand.

Instantly there came another scream from within, and I could see that it came from a young woman who sat on the floor swaying herself backwards and for-

wards, as if either in pain or extreme terror. There was not a moment to be lost, as I well knew. As another volley was poured into the adjoining room I burst in a pane of the window just as the colonel sprang through the door, a pistol in one hand and a naked sword in the other, as if prepared to repel this new attack.

"For God's sake, don't fire colonel," I shouted. "Open the window. It was the only way to reach you."

"Jenkins," he exclaimed, "is it you?"

"Yes; unlock the window before they come."

Without another word he sprang forward and unfastened the bolt; then he went back to the fight in the other room. His white hair seemed to float behind him as he went. His face was blackened with smoke, his dress was wild and disordered, but the fire of battle was in the old man's look, and I thought he had never looked half so much a man as he did then.

I pushed up the window and vaulted into the room, the carbine in my hand. It was not too soon. As I did so a bullet struck and broke the window just over my head. As I dragged the shutter to after me, I felt a hand upon it from the outside also. Its force yielded to my own, and the shutter closed; but there was no longer a fastening to secure my advantage. I looked round me, but I could see nothing which I could use for the purpose. I stepped back, and let the shutter go. As I did so it was torn open, and in an instant a head and shoulders which I knew for those of Tom the hut-keeper were through the still open window.

I did not hesitate now. In the face before me there was no hesitation. In the eyes before me there was little that was human, nothing that was merciful. In

an instant I raised the heavy carbine and struck. The butt, heavily bound with brass, met him full on the brow, and he disappeared: without a word or a cry he fell back, and the window was free. I dragged the shutter to once more. I shut the window down and bolted it. Then I looked round me. There were a couple of mattresses on the floor, and upon these, groaning in agony, lay Captain Malcolm.

In an instant I was at his side. I bent over to speak to him. He looked at me, and he knew me, for he scowled upward in my face.

"You have two mattresses here, captain. Let me barricade the window with one of them: it may save your life," I exclaimed. He stared at me fiercely for a moment, and again the cruel look came into his eyes which I had seen there before.

"No," he said. "Barricade the window yourself. Curse you, what else are you good for?" Then he laughed; it was a ghastly laugh, full of agony—full, too, of the helpless longing for revenge. I turned away. I could not drag the bed from under him. I could not provide for my own safety at the expense of this wounded fiend.

I looked at the girl seated on the floor and saw that her arm was bleeding. She was wounded, but she could understand me. "Look to the window," I almost shouted in her ear. "If anybody tries to get in, shout for help." And in an instant I had sprung through the open door into the room beyond.

There the colonel stood at bay. He had heaped up some tables and a chest of drawers and an old book-case against the door, and the convicts were trying to force an entrance. Already most of the furniture had been smashed to pieces. They could easily have vaulted

over what was left but for the stern figure of the old soldier who, with sword and pistol, stood on the defensive still. Their fierce wild faces showed in the doorway as they tried to break down or remove the remaining obstacles, and I could see the gleam of more than one gun-barrel among them. I glanced round the room, and saw that Miss Malcolm was there. She was seated at the table, pale as death, her dark hair hanging somewhat disordered round her white face, but her hands calmly employed in loading a pistol for her father.

There was but one candle in the room, and the colonel had with prudent foresight placed it where it could give least advantage to the assailants and do the least to endanger the defenders.

The colonel saw me, and a stern smile dawned on his face.

"Take the captain's sword there, Jenkins, and let us stand to the last. I think I can trust you now."

"To the death, sir. But a quarter of an hour should do it now. They'll be here in that time."

"You have seen them, then?"

"Yes, and I have come to tell you to hold out till they come and to help you to do it."

"My God, and you did this for me and mine? It is not possible, man. What are you?"

I made no reply. At the moment a rush was made against what was left of the barricade, and several heads appeared above it. I clubbed the carbine that I held and sprang forward. Twice I struck with the gun, and twice the colonel's sword flashed in the air. The heads disappeared.

Then there was a pause. Could they be drawing off? The colonel seemed to think so, for he exclaimed

—"Ha, you scoundrels, you had better make haste. Ten minutes more and you will be too late." A few fierce oaths was the only reply, and still the pause continued. We waited and watched in silence.

The colonel leaned, as if exhausted, on his sword, and looked at me. My eyes wandered round the room and then rested on Miss Malcolm. She knew that I was there, I am sure, but she never looked up. Why should she, after all? Surely I was man enough to die for her without being looked at.

The colonel saw the direction of my look, possibly he read the expression of my eyes, for he shook his head, and I thought the look he gave me was a look of pity.

We had not long to wait. Suddenly there was a crackling sound in an adjoining room, and almost at the same moment the smell of fire reached us. They were setting fire to the house. If their only object was to destroy us, it was their best course. To fight this new enemy we were quite powerless, as both we and they knew well.

The colonel looked round at his daughter, and I could see something like despair in the old man's expression. She put down the pistol quietly on the table and rose. She evidently knew that this was a new enemy against which weapons were powerless.

"We can retreat into the next room," said the colonel, glancing at me.

"Not yet, Colonel Malcolm; not one moment before we are compelled. Let Miss Malcolm go; but they will rush the door if we leave our post. You see they have not fired the passage."

"True," he said. "Well, 'inch by inch' is a good rule, even when fire is the attacking party."

The flames increased fast. But a few minutes had passed, and already the partition had begun to crack and gape in chinks, and smoke and even fire to find its way through into the dining-room. It began to eddy along the passage also, and to come in at the open doorway. Still, no further attempt was made to force an entrance; still no living assailant showed himself in the doorway.

Suddenly, with a rush and a roar, the fire burst through the partition wall, and began to climb the ceiling of the room in which we stood. The colonel motioned to his daughter to retreat into the study, while for a few seconds more we watched the door. It was as I had suspected; the convicts had called in the fire as an ally, not as a substitute. There was a sound of hasty footsteps in the passage, and once more the doorway was full of heads. The colonel fired his pistol and sprang forward with his sword. I also sprang forward to help him; but now the fire proved an assistance to the attacking party. The flames seemed almost to scorch us, and the smoke made everything indistinct. We struck about us, indeed, but we struck wildly, and with no certain aim, and I saw that we could no longer defend the entrance against numbers. One man had nearly got inside the barricade when I saw and felled him with the carbine; then, shouting, "Back, colonel, back!" I sprang through the smoke and flames into the inner room. In a moment the colonel was beside me, and we turned to repel the expected rush. It did not come. A strong current of air drove smoke and flame for a moment across the room we had just left, and had no doubt driven back the men who were attacking us.

I shut and locked the study door, rather to keep

back the fire than the assailants. Almost at the same instant several shots were fired through the window, and the frame and the glass were smashed by heavy blows. I rushed to oppose this new attack, the colonel at my side. We were met by a second volley from several guns, and I staggered for an instant, feeling that I had been struck. Then I saw the colonel in front of me grappling fiercely with a man apparently much bigger and stronger than himself. I struck wildly at his opponent with my gun. The man staggered back and fell, but the stock of the carbine snapped short off, leaving only the barrel in my hand. For a few confused seconds I can remember that I struck right and left with this weapon, and then I found myself grappled by a man taller, and, for the moment, stronger than myself. I struggled wildly to get my arm free, and in the struggle he fell, and bore me to the ground. I was below, and he seized me by the throat with a murderous grip. "Aha!" he hissed into my face, through his set teeth, "aha, my gentleman; have I got you at last?" It was the harsh voice of Long Jim that spoke. The wolfish and blood-shot eyes of Long Jim glared fiercely into my own. I made a desperate struggle to rise, and failed. Then there was a roar and a crash, and I knew no more.

I came to myself after what could only have been a few moments of unconsciousness. I started up into a sitting posture, and gazed round me with the startled, unreal sensations of a man suddenly relieved from deadly peril, and ignorant of the means of his release. The body of Long Jim lay, still and heavy, where it had fallen across my legs. There was a knot of men within a few feet of me crowded round something in the corner next to the window, and at the other end of

the room the smoke was forcing its way through the door, and the crackling of flames could be heard even above the noise of the falling rain. With an effort I drew my legs clear of my late assailant, and rose with difficulty to my feet. I staggered as I tried to reach the group before me, and they looked dim and indistinct before my eyes. Some one grasped me by the arm, and led me forward. The group of men made way as we came, and I recognized the face of young Curtis, standing with something like a letter in his hand. They all looked at me with curious eyes. I noticed that, but I could make no effort to understand what it meant.

The colonel lay stretched on a mattress on the floor, propped against the wall with pillows, and Miss Malcolm knelt at his head, her arm round his neck and partly supporting his head on her shoulder. He looked round vaguely till his eyes rested on me, then a sudden look of recollection spread over his face.

"Jenkins," he said, "Jenkins, here's something for you. I hope it contains good news. I know a man when I see him. And you have shown yourself both a man and a gentleman. Good-bye, Jenkins, I'm going."

He spoke low and with difficulty, and he tried to hold out his hand in which he held a letter. I bent forward over the mattress to reach it. I grasped the letter and grasped his hand. As I did so my eyes fell on the address. The writing was shaky and feeble, but still I knew my father's writing. The address was "Charles Fortescue, Esq., per favor of H. M. Secretary of State, Downing Street." I stared stupidly at the writing. I looked stupidly in the face of the dying man before me. My eyes rested on the pale and

troubled face of Miss Malcolm, and I fancied her eyes rested on me. Then the smoke seemed to come between us once more, and make all dim. I felt myself sinking forward slowly. I made a half effort to stop myself, and I was conscious of nothing more.

PART III.
AFTER THE STORM.

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PART III.

AFTER THE STORM.

CHAPTER I.

It was a very long time before I awoke to perfect consciousness. I was conscious, indeed, in a degree of a long succession of visions or dreams, sometimes hazy and vague, at others vivid and terrible. I lived over again many a scene of my actual experience, but always with a difference. Strange incidents happened, strange faces intervened, strange surroundings were about me. But one thing never changed, and one face was never long absent. In each situation of danger, in each crisis of temptation, it was the same face that appeared to ward off the danger or to strengthen me to resist the temptation. It was the face of Miss Malcolm, just as I saw it when she gave me her hand as we parted at the gate of the home paddock.

At last I awoke. The first thing I can remember was the soft dim light of a darkened room through which there streamed from the window to the floor one slender shaft of sunlight. I lay and watched the motes that danced and swam in that little river of light, and I cannot express the delight it was to watch them, and to know, or at least to feel, that here at last was some-

thing real. Then I tried to move, and was feebly surprised to find that I was unable to do so. Then I heard a soft, stealthy footstep, and could see a woman's face bend over and look into my own. I smiled, and she drew back quickly, and I could hear her leave the room. I tried to think who she was and where she had gone, but the effort was too great, and gradually I lost consciousness once more.

From that day I grew stronger. Each time I woke I seemed to have gained a fresh stock of vigor; each time I sank to sleep I seemed to obtain real refreshment. I had escaped from dream-land once for all, for now my sleep was undisturbed by memories of the past and unchequered by dreams of the future. I was convalescent. Strangely enough, I had little memory and no curiosity. I appeared to have many friends, and yet it was long before I asked myself who they could be, or thought of asking a question either of my kind nurse or of the doctor, whose face was strangely familiar, like a face out of some former existence, but of whose identity I was wholly and contentedly ignorant.

Gradually, as I grew stronger, this apathy began to wear away. Day by day I was conscious of a greater amount of interest in the faces I saw, which were but two, and in the low voices I heard asking after my health. Still I hesitated to ask. With returning strength there came also, not recollection of the past, indeed, but a glimmering consciousness of a past, the forerunner of recollection. I remembered nothing, but I trembled on the brink of memory, and instinctively I shrank. I was the subject of a tender thoughtfulness from day to day, for which I seemed to myself vaguely to be unable to account.

Curiosity at last won the day, and I asked my nurse, who was moving softly about the room, tidying what was already perfection, where I was. She turned quickly and looked at me as if startled by the question, or by the fact that I had at last asked a question at all; then, dropping a courtesy, and saying, "In Sydney, sir, to be sure," she hastily left the room. In a few minutes a footstep sounded in the passage, and the doctor entered the room and came quietly up to the bed. He looked into my eyes with an expression of such eager curiosity that I broke into a feeble laugh. "Ha!" he exclaimed, "natural, quite natural! I thought as much; indeed, I said so, but that ass Bridges would have it—but there, only another illustration, after all." As he spoke he was inspecting my eyes and face critically and minutely, and when he had finished he laughed, in concert with the laugh which my own weakness and his singular excitement would not allow me to get over.

"Now, I suppose, you want to know everything, don't you?" he exclaimed, using his pocket handkerchief with what seemed unnecessary vigor.

"I'm not so unreasonable, doctor; only one or two things."

"Well, my dear sir, what are they? I dare say that old fool Bridges would say I was killing you. But there, never mind him. What is it?"

"Only this, where am I, and why am I here?"

"Good, very good, indeed. Curiosity restored, memory soon follow. Well, sir, you are in Sydney, in hospital. You are here for a variety of reasons, some of which I don't know. One of them was that you were all but dead of wounds and fever."

I lay back on the pillow as he spoke. Yes, he was

right ; curiosity was the forerunner of memory. Even as he spoke, the veil that hung over the past seemed to part asunder, and the last active scenes of my life were again acted before me. I stood again in the room of the burning house. I looked again into the haggard and deathly face of Colonel Malcolm. I seemed to hear once more his last words ; and again I seemed to take from his trembling hand the letter with that address. I looked up quickly in the doctor's face. "There was a letter, doctor."

"I said so," exclaimed the worthy enthusiast. "I said so. Yes, there was a letter, and it is here. But wait. Let me feel your pulse." He seized my wrist, although I question if he was calm enough to count the beats of my pulse. I pulled it feebly away. "Oh, never mind the pulse, doctor ; the excitement of suspense is the worst kind of excitement."

"True," he said, "true. A very sensible observation, too. I wonder how long it would have taken Bridges to find that out !"

He crossed the room and opened a drawer, then he came back with the letter in his hand.

"I won't leave the room," he said, "for I am afraid this will be a trying letter, whatever it contains."

I scarcely heard what the worthy doctor said ; I hardly understood a word he uttered. I held the letter in my hands once more. I recognized the familiar, though sadly altered writing.

I paused for an instant, then I broke the seal. I suppose I was clumsy ; I suppose the excitement had made my hands even more tremulous than usual. Two enclosures fell out of the envelope upon the bed. One was open and short, the other was closed and sealed with black sealing-wax. I lifted the open letter, after

pausing a moment to recover myself. It was written like the address, and was signed by my father.

“MY DEAR SON,—I bless you for your noble sacrifice, yet I can but regret that it was made in vain. He who was my son did not know it. Thank God, there is still that to be said for him. What he had to say you will find enclosed with this. He left it behind him when he could no longer face disgrace. Would to God he had died earlier and otherwise. For the sake of the dead you have concealed the truth so long; for the sake of the living I have made it fully known where it was necessary to right you. If possible, my son, let me see you again, that I may bless you before I die.

“Your loving father,

“CHARLES FORTESCUE.”

There was no date—nothing to indicate when it was written or where. Abruptly it began; tremulously it ended. It was the letter indited by a broken heart. Was that heart already cold? Was the trembling hand that had penned the lines already at rest? It might be so; most likely it was. Slowly my eyes followed the irregular lines to the bottom of the page; the sheet dropped from my nerveless fingers.

“Righted,” I murmured to myself. “Righted, but at what a price!” The death of a father and a brother, the disgrace of an old and honorable house. Righted! Alas, there are wrongs that are never righted in this world: will they ever be so in any other?

I looked at the sealed enclosure for some time, but I had not the courage to open it. It had to be done, however, and at last I did it. It was George’s writing, but hurried, agitated, and in places nearly illegible.

"MY BROTHER,—This is a message from the dead. Long months before you hear of these lines or of me I shall have lain in a dishonored grave. It is just, and it is necessary. Believe me, I never knew. God knows I am bad enough, but never, at the worst, as bad as that. To-day I have seen the Governor of Newgate and I have heard all. Oh, my God, what must you have thought of me? Of course you knew all along that I was the man. Now, others must know it too. To me, after to-night that will matter nothing; to you it will still matter something. Let me tell you how it was. It was for a wager that I robbed the coach, and when I had done it with so terrible a result I paid the bet with some of the money rather than tell the truth. Then I went to France, and I never saw you again. To-day, only to-day—I swear by heaven—did I learn how you had sacrificed yourself for me. The shame of it and the horror of it would kill me if my life had not been forfeited at any rate. There remains only one thing to be done now, and it is easy enough—easier by far than living on as the scoundrel who was brave enough to rob and murder, and coward enough to let his brother pay the penalty. Think kindly of me, sometimes, Charley, if you can. Remember that we were boys together, and forget my later life when you can. I did not mean to be a criminal. Still less did I mean to be a coward who, by concealing his crime, let his brother suffer for it. Perhaps years hence you may even forgive me. I hope so, though I shall never know it. Good-bye.

"GEORGE FORTESCUE."

The paper dropped from my hand. Here, then, was the end of it all. My sacrifice had been made, and it

had failed. Personally I was cleared of guilt. Personally I was in some sense restored at the cost of all for which I had struggled and suffered ; but the clearing could, after all, be only partial, the restoration only a name. Nothing could bring back what was lost. Nothing could erase the brands of shame and of degradation from body and soul. There are blots too deep for erasure. There are scars which after healing are hardly less revolting than before.

Time passed me by, and still I remained as at first. The doctor came and glanced at me once or twice, went away again without speaking, and at last he left the room. There I sat propped with pillows, idly turning in my hands the fatal letters which only spoke to me of sorrow without remedy and failure without hope. I cannot say I thought, perhaps my brain was still too weak for thought, but it was not too insensible for feeling. How long I remained there alone I cannot even guess, for sensation and not duration was present with me then. I was alone and it seemed as if I was condemned to be alone for ever. Of what account were moments or hours in such a case as mine ?

At last the doctor returned. He entered softly and came to the side of my bed, and there was sympathy and even emotion in his face as he looked at me silently.

I felt that so it was, and I was grateful. "Thank you, doctor," I said, "you are very kind."

His face lighted up with an expression of satisfaction. "Wait a minute," he said, "you can thank me then."

Again he left the room for a minute or two ; then he came back. I could hear him open the door softly, but from where I lay I could not see it. I had no curiosity, however ; I had returned to my melancholy musings.

"Mr. Fortescue!" The name was spoken in a voice

that was low and slightly tremulous, but it was a voice like no other voice on earth to my ear.

I turned my face. She stood there—pale; dressed wholly in black; her large soft eyes full of tears. Face to face with me once more stood the woman who had been my good angel—the one woman on earth to me.

I looked at her, and once more she held out her hand to me. Once more I grasped it. I bent over it, but my emotion overcame me. I was very weak, and now great tears gathered in my eyes, and dropped slowly upon her hand and on mine. I think she saw and understood, for she let the hand remain. And every tear as it fell seemed to wash away a stain from my past; while dimly through the mist I seemed able to discern the rainbow colors of a happier future.

CHAPTER II.

LEAVES FROM MISS MALCOLM'S DIARY.

DECEMBER 20, 1834.—I have been here exactly three months now, and, although I don't like saying it even to myself, I am so disappointed. Not with the country or the climate, for these are far better than I expected—it is the life that is so dreary and so lonely. Papa is ever so kind, and I know he does his best to make me like it; and cousin Reginald is always attentive and nice. We see something of our neighbors, too—(fancy neighbors thirty or forty miles away!)—and some of them are pleasant people, though hardly what one could make friends of. But yet it is dreary and lonely. We have two Irish maids, and besides the overseer there are three free men on the station, and that is all. I don't know how many prisoners there are, for I never see any of them except a long way off, and papa never speaks of them when I am there, but somehow I can't help thinking about them, poor creatures. I have seen the huts where they live, and they seem to me dreadful places; and I have seen some of the men themselves at a distance, and they seemed to me to look dreadful, too—so utterly hopeless and bad. I always feel as if we were doing wrong while we don't try to do anything to make their lives less wretched. Perhaps if we did it might make them better. I know that convicts are not all so bad, for I can remember those we had on the Torres Vedras. I don't think any of them were quite ungrateful for kindness. I often wonder what became

of 321 and 322. Papa never told me anything about them, and I have never liked to ask him after the way he spoke when I asked him to take them. How strange it would be if they were here after all, living, perhaps, in those dreadful huts—and I know he must once have lived so differently. How strange it must be, and horrible, if after all it were only some terrible mistake. I wonder if it is possible that a man could suffer in that way and yet live on. Yet he looked like it. I never saw such a face; and even now I see it often in my dreams—always with the same stony look in the eyes and always the same dull, fierce fire smouldering far down in their black depths. But there—I mustn't think of it or I shall be haunted.

January 10, 1835.—I am afraid things are not going on well with the prisoners, and I can't help being a little afraid that Reginald and even papa must be a little to blame. Of course I don't know much about it, and I may be wrong, for they never talk about these things before me; but Bridget says some of our prisoners have been flogged for insubordination over at Turner's run. I don't like Mr. Turner one bit, and I wonder papa has anything to do with him. I know he used to say he was a cruel tyrant to his own men, and how can he let him judge and punish ours? I am afraid it is quite true, though, and I don't think it ever does one scrap of good. I know papa looks twice as stern and anxious as he did when first I came up, and I can see that Reginald feels very uncomfortable. I wonder if the prisoners would really do anything. Bridget says they sometimes do when they grow very desperate, and then go off and turn into bushrangers. Oh, I do hope they won't grow desperate. I wish I knew some of them. I think if only one knew their

faces it would seem less dreadful. It is just like a great big thunder-cloud creeping over the sky, when one can't even fancy where the flash is going to come from first.

February 27.—I think I made a discovery to-day. I do believe he is here, after all. Papa was talking in the garden this morning to Mr. Pinnock, and I could hear from my room. Papa said, "How does he seem to get on at that work?" and Mr. Pinnock said, "Joe tells me he is quite wonderful for a new hand. He has taken that wild colt they call 'Fireking,' that nobody could ride, and he can do anything with him already." "Well," said papa, "you had better keep him at that work, I think; he is better away from the others." "Very well, sir," Mr. Pinnock said, "I think so, too. You see he is so different from the rest that if he turned rusty he would be a natural leader and very dangerous." "You think so, do you?" papa said, as if he was considering. "Well, I'm almost sorry, but there, it can't be helped now. So you had better keep him with Joe. Does he seem sulky?" "Well, sir, I shouldn't exactly call it that. He isn't a bit like any other hand I've ever had to do with, that's the fact. You see, sir, when we meet he's civil enough; but he has a look in his eyes that I can't describe, only I don't like it." "He isn't disrespectful, then?" "Why, no, sir, not what you could call disrespectful, you see; but it makes me uncomfortable, as if it was himself he respected and not me." That was all I heard, for they walked round the end of the house; but I feel sure they were speaking about him. That look in his eyes is the very one I saw there that last morning on board the Torres Vedras—so stony, and yet so full of fire, deep down. And then the wild horse, too. He was

just that sort of man. I can fancy I see him now as he plunged headlong after little Georgie into the rushing waves. Yes, it must be the same. How strange and how terrible such a life must be to him! Joe—he is one of the stockmen, I know—perhaps I could find out something through him. Bridget often talks to Joe when he comes up to the house: I dare say I could hear through her. I wish there was any way of making the life less terrible for him. It must be a dreadful life for any one, but for a gentleman—and he is a gentleman, I am quite certain—I don't know how he can go on living.

March 3.—I got Bridget to ask Joe about him; and now I wish I hadn't. What she has just told me is dreadful. Joe says his name is Jenkins, and that the prisoners always call him "the Gentleman," so it must be the same. He has been helping Joe with the cattle for a good while now, and he told Bridget that he was the finest man he had ever seen, and the boldest rider. What is so dreadful is that Bridget says he was one of the men who was tried and punished over at Turner's. Flogged, actually flogged! I can hardly believe it possible, somehow, though Bridget says that Joe was quite sure, for he swore, and said it was a shame. What an awful thing, if it is really true! A gentleman—for whatever he may have done in all his life I know he is a gentleman still. Yes, and I believe an innocent man, too. I am quite sure he never robbed any one in his life; and if he didn't do that he is almost sure not to have done the murder either. Juries often make mistakes, I know: I have often heard of terrible mistakes found out years after, when it was too late. And if this should be a case like that and papa has been the means of getting him flogged—oh, it is too horrible.

Now I can understand what papa meant by saying he was almost sorry. Almost sorry, indeed, for being the cause of an outrage like that! I could cry when I think of it—I could go down on my knees and beg forgiveness if by any terrible mistake I had done such a thing. How he must hate papa and all of us for it. I know I should, in his place, with my whole heart. Oh, dear, I wish I had never tried to find out about it at all; for now I know, and I can't do one single thing to make matters better.

March 9.—I have seen him to-day for the first time since that last day on board ship. We were going for a ride—papa and Reginald and I—when we met him. He was riding a very tall bay horse and carrying poor Joe in his arms. We thought something must be wrong, so papa rode across to meet him. Reginald and I followed a little way behind him. When we got close I felt quite sure Joe must be dead. Papa spoke to him very sternly, and asked what had happened. He said Joe had been killed by the blacks up at the western range. Then papa asked two or three questions, as if he didn't believe him—almost as if he thought he might have murdered Joe himself. I looked at him whilst papa was speaking, and his face frightened me. It was a good deal changed from what it had been even on that last day on board ship. It was quite calm, deadly calm—now; but it was far more terrible than any other face I ever saw that was angry. He answered papa very quietly, but there was something in his tone that made me tremble. I thought of all he must have suffered, and then I seemed to understand it. I only wondered how he could manage to speak quietly at all. Then Reginald said something. I didn't hear what it was exactly, but it must have been some-

thing against him, I think—for he just turned round and looked at him. I don't know what it was in that look that did it, but I know I felt a cold chill run all down my back as I looked at him. Reginald didn't like it either, I could see, for he turned away hastily and proposed that we should ride on. I couldn't go, somehow. I felt as if I must say something, so I reminded papa about his saving Georgie Malet's life at the risk of his own. When I spoke, he looked at me for the first time. I could see that he knew me in a moment, and then such a strange light sprang up in his eyes all at once. I don't know what it was like exactly; but at the moment it reminded me of the warm glowing light—both bright and soft—that often comes into the eastern sky just before the sun rises. I only looked for one moment, for of course one couldn't stare at him, and then papa said he would inquire about Joe and told him to take the body down to Mr. Pinnock's house and bring Mr. Pinnock up. I asked papa one or two questions, and he spoke in such a bitter contemptuous tone that I asked no more. I wonder if Reginald had anything specially to do with his being punished at Turner's. I wonder what papa will find out when he goes to find out about Joe.

March 11.—Papa was away all day yesterday at the western range, where Joe was killed. He seemed very tired when he got home, and I didn't like to worry him with questions, especially while Reginald was there. This morning, after Reginald went out, I asked him if he had seen any blacks. He looked at me for a moment, curiously, I thought; then he said "Yes, several." "Were they dangerous?" I asked. "No, they were dead," he said. "Dead? How had they been killed, papa?" "That hero of yours, Kate, must have

killed them, I suppose, as he said he did." "Then you found I was right about him, papa. He was to be trusted?" He looked at me for a moment, and I thought he looked annoyed. Then he said, very coldly, "Yes, in this case I believe he spoke the truth." Then he turned away. I can't think what annoyed him, but I feel assured he was annoyed at my asking. I couldn't ask anything more then, but Bridget heard from one of the other stockmen, who went with papa, how it was. These dreadful blacks came and speared both Joe and his horse before he got there. Then he came up, and though he had no gun or anything but his whip, he rode in among them and drove them all away. He actually killed three of them. Dick told Bridget that he had broken their skulls with his whip-handle. He seemed to be very much surprised, and he might well be. I suppose such a thing was never done before in all the world. Oh, if I were only a man, how I should love to be strong and brave like that. It was just like his leaping into the sea after Georgie. How strange and delightful it must feel to have no fears at all.

April 8.—This has been the strangest and most terrible day in all my life. Even now I can hardly remember clearly all that has happened. When Reginald and I went out after lunch for our usual ride, I noticed how very curious the sky looked. There were no clouds at all, yet, somehow, the sky wasn't blue, but only grey and dirty looking. The sun seemed hot, but it didn't shine brightly, only with a strange glaring light I had never noticed before. Reginald didn't seem to think much of it, so we rode on towards the ranges. By the time we got there it had begun to blow with quite a strong breeze in our faces, and though the

wind was quite hot it seemed a little better than nothing. The dreadful drought we have had so long had made itself felt even among the trees up on the range. Any grass there had been withered, of course, to a yellowish-brown color, so that you could hardly fancy it had ever been green and fresh looking. The strange thing was that even the leaves of the trees were withered, too, and all shrivelled up and dry. Some of them had dropped off altogether, and lay in little brown heaps under the trees and shrubs. It was altogether a very melancholy sight—far more melancholy than even a wintry wood at home. That seems natural and beautiful, even though it isn't cheerful, but this looked only wretched and unnatural.

We crossed the range and rode down the other side till we came to what the men call "the Big Scrub." I think Reginald wanted to see the stockmen in charge of the cattle there about something, for he stopped and "coo-eed" a good many times, but nobody answered. At last he gave it up, and we turned and rode back. It was blowing much harder now,—indeed, it was growing very boisterous, and we were glad to turn our backs to it. At last, just as we were at the beginning of the slope up to the range again, we saw a man on horseback coming down. I knew him in a moment, and I think Reginald did, too, for he gave an impatient pull at his rein and made his horse canter. In a minute or two we met him. I couldn't help looking at him as he came near. Horse and man were so well matched—both looked so powerful and yet so entirely at ease. When we met him he pulled his horse to one side to give us plenty of room to pass. I couldn't help it, I smiled and bowed to him as I should have done if I had met him riding in the park. He instantly pulled

off his hat, and the same strangely bright look came into his eyes once more as I passed him.

We went slowly up the hill without speaking. I don't know what Reginald was thinking of, and I hardly know what I was thinking about myself, when all of a sudden I noticed that the air was growing hazy with smoke. My exclamation attracted Reginald's attention to it, too. He tried to make out what it was, but from where we were we couldn't see where it came from at all. Reginald called to me to stay where I was till he came back, and then rode back to find out. This turned out to be a terrible mistake, but of course we didn't know any better at the time. I began to grow frightened. Already the smoke began to come up in black waves that surged round the tall gum-trees and settled down among the shrubs. The wind was growing stronger, too, and the trees were beginning to bend and moan, and through it all I fancied I could hear the sound of a distant roaring in the direction from which the wind was coming. Just then Reginald came galloping back along the track. "It's a great bush fire," he shouted. "We must make haste out of this."

He galloped on, and I galloped after him. I could feel that my little mare Fleetwing was very much frightened, and I didn't wonder at it, for I know I was growing frightened myself. The smoke was the most trying part of it, I think, and the great heat, but the most frightful thing was the terrible roaring noise behind us. Again and again I tried to look over my shoulder to make out what it could be. I couldn't help it, the noise was so dreadful, and I could see that Reginald did just the same, but it was useless. We only scorched our faces and got our eyes blinded with the heat and the smoke. I began to grow very frightened, indeed.

The stories I had heard some of our visitors tell of terrible bush fires and of people being caught in them and lost, all rushed back on my memory at once, and I began to feel as if we should never get away.

It grew hotter and hotter. The wind seemed to scorch wherever it touched our skin, and the smoke was all round us now so that we could see nothing distinctly. The gum-trees seemed to come and go through the smoke, appearing and vanishing again like tall gray ghosts, and the underwood was all blurred and indistinct, and flitted past us like something half seen in a dream. I could just make out Reginald's grey horse in front of me, and all I was clearly conscious of was the effort to make Fleetwing follow him.

I suppose it was my mistake. Most likely if I had not pulled at the rein poor Fleetwing would have managed better, and all sorts of misfortunes would have been avoided. At any rate, I did the best I could, and I hardly knew what I was doing, after all. All on a sudden something happened to Fleetwing. I don't know how or why it was, but I felt her fall under me. It was like falling in a dream. It did not make me feel any more frightened than I was before, only I felt myself going. Fleetwing had fallen, and before I could think at all I found that I had scrambled to my feet. I must have screamed, I suppose, for when I looked round Reginald had turned his horse and come back. "Can't she rise?" he shouted. I could scarcely hear him, for the noise all around us had grown so awful. I looked stupidly at poor Fleetwing, who lay on her side, partly over a log, and I shook my head. I don't know what I thought at the moment. I suppose I was really too confused to think, but I fancy sorrow for poor

Fleetwing was the nearest thing to thought in my mind just then.

"For God's sake try to get her up, Kate, or we are lost," he shouted again, getting off his horse and trying to lead him closer. I looked in his face, and I hardly knew him. He was deadly pale, and oh, so ghastly, and his eyes were full of a wild look of terror. I knew then that he was even more afraid than I was, and I stared at him in surprise. I had never thought before of a man getting frightened, and for the moment it seemed to drive away my own fears.

The fire was very near us now. We could hear it hiss and crackle as well as roar, and Reginald's horse was so terrified that he struggled hard to get away. We must have been quite close together, yet the wreaths of smoke curled in between and seemed to separate us. Reginald shouted for help again and again. I had no idea his voice was so strong, yet it was thrown back as if it only went a very few yards from where we stood. Suddenly there came a shout in reply. It seemed to wake me up from the stupid numb lethargy that seemed creeping over me. I started and looked around, and I could just see through the black smoke that was growing red now in places, as if with fire, the tall red horse and the powerful figure of his rider. They looked gigantic as they came towards us through the smoke, leaping wildly over the logs and bushes.

In an instant he had thrown himself from his horse beside us and said something to Reginald. I didn't hear what it was, for at that moment a great crimson tongue of fire darted out of a black cloud of smoke and seized on the top of a huge old gum-tree which was actually in front of us. The tree seemed to trem-

ble and wither up in its grasp, and thousands of burning, crackling leaves fell all round us in a shower. In spite of my fear I could not help looking at it just for a moment, it was so awfully beautiful, and when I looked back again Reginald was struggling into the saddle again. Almost before he could get up, the horse started, but as he went Reginald looked back and shook his fist, shouting, "Give your master's daughter the horse, you scoundrel!" Cruel as the words were, the tone of them was more cruel still. I don't think until that moment I ever knew what it was really to feel ashamed; every drop of blood in my body seemed to fly to my face, and I felt as if I could never look at him again. Then the man beside me spoke, and, in spite of the noise, his voice sounded clear and strong, and, in spite of our danger, it was quite calm.

He said, "Come, Miss Malcolm. It is not too late yet." I couldn't help it; ashamed as I was, I had to look him in the face; frightened as I was, I had to obey his quiet tone of command. I looked at him, and then I couldn't look away. I had just been shocked by the sight of the terror in Reginald's face, and his was just the opposite. There was not a sign of fear, only calm readiness and perfect confidence. There was contempt—yes, a good deal of contempt—in his look, too, and I wondered for a moment whether it was caused by my fright. Then I remembered Reginald's words, and his tone and his looks; and I knew what it meant, and how well it was deserved.

He beckoned me to come closer to his horse, and I knew he meant to try and take me with him. I felt sure it must be hopeless, and I seemed to know that he was only going to sacrifice his own life in trying to save mine. I don't exactly know what I said, but I

know I refused. I know I told him to leave me and to save his own life.

"Never," he exclaimed. "Come with me. For God's sake, come, and I will save you yet. If not, I can die here." I seemed to know what he felt when he said that. I knew, or at least I thought I knew, that he was thinking of his being a convict and that I would rather die than trust myself to him; and I felt ashamed. It seemed to me that it would be almost more insulting than Reginald's words if I refused to trust him: I couldn't do it.

I looked him in the face once more, and his strong fiery black eyes seemed to master me: I had to do as he wished.

I held out my hand to him and said I trusted him. It seemed all to pass in a moment. The burning, shrivelling leaves were still falling from the gum-tree around us, and the roaring of the fire was behind us still, when I found myself swung upon the saddle in front of him and clasped tightly round the waist.

I could feel the strong bounding motion of the horse under me: I could see the falling leaves sparkling and flickering through the smoke, and the tall trees blazing like torches to their very topmost branches on all sides of us; and I could feel rather than see that he was bending over me to keep the burning leaves and twigs off my face as I leaned against him. It was awful and terrible, but somehow I was no longer frightened. I suppose it was seeing him so brave and calm that did it. But my head felt heavy, and everything swam before my eyes, and then I lost consciousness.

When I woke again the first thing I saw was his face bending over me. It looked so strong and yet the eyes were so soft and pitying that for the moment I

felt like a little child who is being taken care of. Then I remembered, and sat up, and heard him say, in a very low voice, "Thank God." I looked round, and saw that we had escaped. We were quite clear of the fire now, and not very far from the house. I asked if I couldn't walk, and he dismounted instantly and helped me down. Then we walked on together towards the house, he leading his horse by the bridle. He didn't say anything, and I was so stupid I didn't know what to say. My mind seemed in a whirl and incapable of thinking of anything clearly; only I knew that he was walking there beside me, and I knew that I owed him my life.

He opened the last gate for me to go through, and there he stopped. I passed through and then I looked back for him to follow. He did not move; he only looked after me. Then he said, "Good-bye, Miss Malcolm; good-bye, and God bless you." The last words were almost like a cry, and when I looked into his face it was drawn and dreadfully pale as if he was suffering some terrible agony. Could it be that he thought me ungrateful? Could he fancy that I thought I had a right to his almost throwing away his life for me? I couldn't bear that.

I turned back and offered him my hand. I begged him to believe that I was grateful for his great goodness to me. I could have gone on my knees to him, if it would have got rid of that awful look of agony on his face. He never said a word. He only bent over the hand he held and kissed it. Only once—but that once could have been like no other kiss that any man ever pressed on the hand of any woman, I think. It seemed to burn. My hand has felt it ever since: it feels it now. What did it mean, that kiss? What could it mean, from him to me? I have thought about

it ever since ; I can hardly think of anything else now. It was so wild, so despairing. Could it possibly have been anything else ?

Just before dark they brought Reginald home. He is dreadfully injured, poor fellow. The horse must have fallen with him and broken his arm, and the fire has scorched him dreadfully. He was sensible after they laid him on his bed, but he wouldn't look at me at all. I suppose he can remember. Papa and Mr. Pinnock have taken off his burnt clothes and made him as comfortable as they could till they can send for a doctor, and now Mr. Pinnock has gone home again. It was too late to send any one for a doctor to-night, but papa says a detachment of the mounted force will be here to-morrow and perhaps they may have a doctor with them. I heard papa say when he spoke of the force coming, "Thank God for that." I wonder what he meant by that ? Well, I had better leave off. I have written a very long piece, I see ; but I am never likely in all my life to have such an adventure to write about again.

CHAPTER III.

MISS MALCOLM'S STORY.

I HAVE promised him to write this, and already I have sat for an hour looking hopelessly at the last entries in the old diary that was saved from the fire. It all seems so very strange and distant now, like the things that may have happened in some former state of existence to some one I knew, but certainly not to myself. It was only a little more than three months ago that I wrote these last lines, and now it all seems so different.

It is really only a few short weeks, and yet a whole life-time seems to have passed since then. How strange it is—and he has hardly lived at all.

I suppose I had better begin this where I left off in my diary, as he wants to know everything. Well, I had scarcely written the last words when there came a frightful flash of lightning, which for the moment seemed to blind me. It was followed instantly by a peal of thunder, the very loudest I ever heard. I rose from my seat and went to the window. It looked out on the garden and I pulled up the blind and tried to look out. It was too dark to see anything. It looked just like a great black wall built up close in front of the window: I could see absolutely nothing. I unfastened the window and opened it a little way. Still I could see nothing. Still it was absolutely dark, and now I noticed that it was absolutely still. The wind had died quite away, and not a breath of air seemed

to be moving. The heavy drops of rain that had begun to fall had stopped again, and now not even a leaf seemed to move in the garden to break the deadly silence. The stillness coming just after that peal of thunder was almost terrible. It was broken quite suddenly by the sound of a light footstep on the garden path at the side of the house, and I heard a voice speaking in a low tone. Then I could hear papa's voice speaking more loudly, and, before I could even try to make out what it was about, there followed the quick, sharp report of a pistol. My first thought was that some one had fired at papa, and I rushed out of my room through the passage and the dining-room to see what it was.

As I burst into the study I found myself once more face to face with my preserver. He had grasped papa's arm and was saying something very earnestly to him as I came in. The light smoke from the pistol still hung about the room in hazy wreaths, and my father still held it in his hand. Both of them looked pale and excited, and papa seemed to be greatly agitated. The other face, although it was pale, was as firm and determined as ever. It had the very same look I had seen on it when Reginald rode away and left us. When he caught sight of me it changed in a moment, as he tried to reassure me about the pistol-shot. Even when I noticed the blood dropping from his shoulder he only smiled—such a calm, easy smile—and said it was nothing. Then he spoke to papa again, and told him we were in real danger and begged him for my sake—he said it was for my sake—to escape at once. But papa said, "No," and I knew we must not, because of poor Reginald. Just for one moment the thought came into my mind how he had deserted us that very day—although

papa didn't know of it—but then I felt ashamed of the thought, for, of course, we couldn't do so to him, when he was quite helpless, poor fellow.

At last he convinced papa, I think, that he really was our friend. It made me shudder to see how hard papa was to convince, for I felt that only the sense that he had treated him badly could have made him doubt: but then, of course, I knew what he had done for me and how he had done it, and I had never had a chance of telling papa anything but the mere fact that he had saved me. Papa, I could see, could hardly understand how he could possibly forgive; and even I, though I knew how noble he was, could hardly look at him, with the blood running from his wound all the time, and yet begging papa to trust him to help us—I could hardly understand how he could do it. He said it was for my sake—for mine. It was like a dream, for as he said it he glanced at me, and there was that look in his eyes I had seen twice before, and I thought—I don't exactly know what I thought, but I seemed to feel a strange new feeling pass through me, and for the moment all the fear and trouble melted away, and I only felt glad. I scarcely heard what was said after that till I saw papa stretch his hand to him. He grasped it, and I could see his whole face light up as he did it with a look I had never seen in any one's face before—not exactly glad, but very beautiful and solemn. Then without another word he turned and jumped out of the open window into the darkness.

I believe both papa and I stood gazing after him when he had gone as long as his quick footstep could be heard. Then I drew a long breath of relief, and exclaimed,—

“Oh, papa, I'm so glad!” He looked strangely at

me for a moment, then he said, almost crossly, I thought,—

“Glad, child? What are you glad about?”

“Glad that he took your hand, papa,” I answered, hardly thinking how it must sound to him. He grew a little red as he said, hastily,—

“You put it very strangely, Kate, I must say. But, after all, the circumstances are singular, I must admit. After all, I must say he is a fine fellow.”

I felt so glad when he said that that I couldn’t speak; only the tears came into my eyes. Why is it, I wonder, that we girls always do that? When we feel ever so determined and heroic, all we seem able to do is to cry. It is horrid.

Papa looked startled and almost angry. “My God, Kate,” he said, “take care. He may be a fine fellow, but he’s a convict all the same.”

“I know, papa, that he is a convict, but I know it must be a mistake. He is a hero. He has shown it twice to-day.” I don’t know how I found courage to answer in this way, but somehow I seemed unable to help it—although I could not look at papa at the time.

“Hush. Nonsense, girl. You must get rid of these romantic fancies. But in the mean time we must do what we can for ourselves.” I was glad he didn’t say anything more. It was a relief to be doing something active, though all the time I was thinking of his wild ride through the darkness and storm, trying to get help for us.

Then papa began to prepare, in case we were attacked before help could come. We were all alone in the house, papa and I, and poor Reginald, lying groaning on his bed. Papa did think of sending for Mr. Pinnock; but there was nobody to send, for it was so dark that

Bridget would not put her head outside the door. I would have tried to find my way, only papa would not let me go. Then he told me we could not possibly defend more than a small part of the house if they came, and he decided to take the dining-room and study, because both windows had strong outside shutters, and the dining-room one had an iron bar inside that made it quite safe.

We managed with a great deal of trouble to bring Reginald's mattress into the study and laid him on the floor in a corner near the window. Then we dragged the furniture to the dining-room door to make a barricade there. Papa had two large pistols, besides his sword, and he showed me how to load them, that I might do it for him while he guarded the door. It took us a long time to do all these things, for Bridget was too much frightened to be the least bit of use. We could hardly get her to do anything but sit and moan that she would be murdered, and why did she ever leave old Ireland?

At last we had done all we could do, and then we had only to wait. That was the worst of all. Papa paced up and down the two rooms with his hands behind him, just as he used to do on the veranda when everything was happy and peaceful; but now his face was very pale, and his eyes looked ghastly and terrible whenever he looked at me. I could only sit and listen and think—perhaps I ought to say dream—of all that had happened on that strange and terrible yet, somehow, not unhappy day. So the time passed on for a long time, and nothing happened. Every now and then there would come a flash of lightning that filled the room for a moment with a blue glare that was blinding while it lasted. Then there would follow a

long rolling crash that sounded as if the roof were of glass and were all being broken to pieces. Then for a while nothing would be heard but the heavy splash of the rain descending in torrents on the roof, and running from the eaves in continuous streams. I don't know how long it lasted. It seemed to be for ages, but I don't suppose it really was so very long.

At last, just as one long roll of thunder died away, there came the shrill sound of a long whistle from the front of the house. We started and listened. Then another came from the back, as if in answer, and then several more from all sides of the house. They had surrounded us. I looked at papa. His face had altered all in a moment. Even the paleness had gone, and now it looked quite natural again, all but the eyes. They had the strangest look, so bright and sparkling. He came over to where I sat by the table and blew out one candle and took the other. Then he said, quite quietly, "Can you see to load, my dear, if I put the light on the mantel-piece?" His tone was just his usual one, only perhaps a little more gentle. "Yes, papa," I said; "are they coming now?" He put the candle on the mantel-piece and came back to me.

"Yes, my dear, they are here. Good-bye, Kate, in case anything happens. Load the pistols as fast as I fire them. Pray God your hero may be in time yet."

Then he stooped down and kissed me. As he did so, there were heavy footsteps on the veranda and a thundering knock at the front door. Papa took a pistol from the table and his sword, and stepping carefully to the door of the room, waited there. Then the front door was violently shaken, and heavy blows were struck on it as if to break it open. It was a heavy door with a very large, strong lock, and it did not give

way. Then, after a moment, we could hear the same noises at the back door, and in a minute or two it seemed to burst open and we could hear footsteps in the passage and voices calling out in the house. There was no light in the house except in the two rooms where we were, and both the doors and windows of these rooms were closed so that they were quite in the dark. We could hear them stumbling about the rooms and swearing terribly, and I think they must have thought we had gone away at first, for I heard one voice say, with a fearful oath, "That beggar has warned them off." Then somebody tried the door of the dining-room, and exclaimed, "No, this door's fast, and there's a light inside. Treed, by God!"

I looked up at papa. He stood quite still, and waited. Then there came loud blows at the door, and then several shots were fired through the wall close to the door. One of the shots struck the stuffed bird that stood on the mantel-piece, and it fell inside the fender. I felt quite sorry about that bird. I had grown accustomed to it, and somehow it looked shocking to see it lying there with its feathers all knocked about.

After beating at it for awhile they burst the door open. Papa hadn't put the things quite against it, and now I could see why. The door only opened about half way, and it quite sheltered me from sight while it was open. The moment it gave way they must have seen the barricade by the light of our candle, for they did not come on at once. I could see papa smile such a strange grim smile, but he never moved nor took his eye off the door for an instant. Quite suddenly two men rushed in and tried to climb over the barricade, and I could see another head just behind them around the edge of the door. The men had got nearly up when papa fired the

pistol. A voice exclaimed, "The devil!" and one man disappeared. Papa sprang forward and struck at the other man with the sword. I saw him raise the sword, but it looked so frightful that I covered my eyes with my hands. I heard a blow, and then a groan and a terrible oath, and at the same moment two guns were fired from the passage. I looked up hastily, but there papa was, quite cool and unhurt. He stepped back and laid the pistol on the table and picked up the other one.

I loaded it and laid it on the table, and so it went on.

Shots were fired from the passage every minute, some through the doorway and some through the wall, but they didn't strike either of us. There were shouts and groans and yells all through the house, and horrible language that made my blood run cold all the time. Then they tried to break down our barricade, and while some of them tried to force their way over the top, others were knocking it to pieces at the bottom with something heavy. Every time any one tried to get over, papa drove him back either with the pistol or with his sword, but he couldn't prevent them from beating it to pieces, as he couldn't see them. Little by little they were managing to break it down. I could see papa looking anxiously at it as the barricade grew less and less, so I looked at it, too, and it seemed as if it would soon all be gone. I suppose I ought to have been very much frightened, but somehow I was not. I think I have been far more frightened by a bad dream, although this seemed to me very much like a dream, too. I looked at papa all the time with my eyes, but very often I seemed to myself to be away, following that desperate ride in the darkness, and wondering what he was thinking about.

All of a sudden there came a scream from Bridget,

in the study, and papa only waited to fire at a man whose head was just showing above a chest of drawers which was the principal part of our defences that was left. The man gave a yell and fell back, and papa dashed through the open door into the study. In a second or two he was back again before any one else had tried to get over, and I noticed a new look on his face as he came back. As he sprang to the table for a pistol he said to me, "There is hope, now, Kate. He is back again." I knew who he meant, of course, and I know I said, "Thank God." People often say that without meaning much, but this time, at least, I felt thankful. It was like hearing that an army had come, and my fears all seemed to go away at once. In a minute or two he came into the dining-room. He had a gun in his hand. I saw him, but I didn't look at him. Somehow I could not, though I was so glad.

I suppose it must have been the sight of his tall, strong figure standing there that made them do it, for after a little delay, and firing a few shots that did no harm, we could hear them trying to get a light. At last they succeeded, and then we could hear the fire begin to crackle and blaze, and knew they were setting fire to the wall of the dining-room next the kitchen. It took some time to do it, but at last the fire caught, and began to crackle and roar as it gained a firm hold of the wall. How these awful men shouted and swore outside the room! It was worse than the bush fire, because it seemed so much more cruel. The bush fire would have killed one, of course, but there would have been no one to rejoice at it.

At last papa told me to go into the study, and he and papa stayed behind in the smoke and fire that began to get very bad in the dining-room. I went and

knelt beside poor Reginald, who was tossing, oh, so miserably, on the mattress we had laid on the floor. I don't think he knew me or anything, for he only looked wildly into my face and whispered, "The fire, the fire! Ride." I put my hand on his brow to try if the touch would soothe him, but he threw it off, and started up, looking really awful, as he exclaimed, "That scoundrel, again! Flog him, shoot him."

At the very moment when he said the words the window gave way with a crash of broken glass and several shots were fired into the room. One of them must have struck Reginald. He threw up the arm that was not broken above his head, and the wild light that was glaring out of his poor mad eyes, that looked at me so terribly, suddenly died out, and with a groan he fell back quite dead. I was so horrified that I could do nothing but look at him, and quite forgot to call out for help; but just then there were more shots, and *he* sprang past me and seized a man who had just got through the window by the throat. There was a fearful struggle quite near me, for it seemed as if there were a dozen men struggling for their lives, and I was so confused and terrified I could only cover my face and try to say a few words of prayer.

Then I heard a loud, sharp voice just outside shout, "No quarter, men!" and when I looked up the room seemed full of men in gray uniforms, and the men in convict garb were gone. The place and the people swam before my eyes. There was a loud roaring sound in my ears, like the sound of that awful sea of fire in the bush once more, and then all grew black and empty.

CHAPTER IV.

I SUPPOSE I must have fainted, but it could only have been for a very few seconds, for I opened my eyes on almost exactly the same scene and people as I had looked on last. An officer with a grave, stern face was bending over the chair in which I had been placed, and when I recovered enough to look up in his face he said, "I am glad you are better, Miss Malcolm. I fear your father is badly hurt."

In a moment my strength seemed to come back to me, and I was strong enough to rise to my feet. I felt stupid and confused, but I said, "Where, oh, where is he?" He offered to help me, but I didn't require help, so he led me across the room to where they had laid papa, close to the broken window, on the bed we had brought down for poor Reginald.

He was lying there propped up with pillows against the wall. His face was deadly pale, and it had a dreadful gray look which I had seen before on some of the men on the "Torres Vedras;" and his eyes seemed dull and sunken in his head. He knew me, for he smiled calmly, but oh, so very feebly that I could hardly help bursting into tears.

"Help me, Kate," he whispered, in a strange, hoarse voice, that somehow sounded far away, trying at the same time to raise himself up. I knelt at his head and put my arm round his neck, raising his head on my shoulder. He was dying. I knew it quite well, but

just then I didn't seem to be able to realize it or think about it. I could only do what he seemed to want, and try to make his position as easy as I could. "Now, read it." His eyes looked at some one, so I looked too, and saw Mr. Curtis was there holding an open letter in his hand. "Read it, quick!" he repeated, impatiently; and then Mr. Curtis read it aloud.

"GOVERNMENT HOUSE, April 3, 1835.

"MY DEAR COLONEL,—The enclosed letter (addressed to Mr. Fortescue) has just reached me from Downing Street. It was covered by a communication from the Secretary of State, which discloses one of the most startling and affecting stories of heroic self-sacrifice which has ever come under my notice.

"The gentleman to whom the enclosed letter is addressed was, I find, assigned to you last September under the name of 'Jenkins.' I am happy to believe that in your hands he is not likely to have endured any ill treatment. I wish I could say as much for many of our settlers. As His Majesty has been pleased to grant him a free pardon, and it will give me personally the greatest pleasure to present him with it, I shall be glad if you will take immediate steps to forward him on his return to Sydney.

"Yours very faithfully,

"RICHARD BOURKE,

"Governor."

He read it in a loud voice to the end, and it pained me to see the look almost of horror that gathered on papa's face as he listened.

"Oh, my God!" he whispered, as if to himself. "Oh, my God!" and great beads of perspiration started on

his cold brow. Then he held out his trembling hand. "The enclosure," he said—"here, give it to me. I must give it him while I can."

Mr. Curtis stooped and placed a long official-looking envelope in his hand. He stared at it a moment, then he looked round him vaguely, as if seeking some one. "Where? where is he?" he asked.

In another moment some one led him to the side of the bed. He was deadly pale, too, almost as pale as papa, and his black hair hung over his face, which was ghastly and streaked with blood. I was so shocked and frightened that I could only look at him. He looked into papa's face and papa into his for several seconds, then papa slowly held out the letter towards him, and said something. I hardly heard what it was, and I am sure I didn't understand it, for I couldn't take my eyes off his face or think of anything else at the moment. He took the letter mechanically and his eyes rested on the address. Then he grasped the hand which papa still held out to him, and as he did so he bent lower and lower, till at last he sank on his face across the bed, still holding papa's hand in his.

They crowded round and lifted him up, but they had to disengage his fingers from papa's: although he was quite unconscious he held them still. I almost thought he was dead. I am sure papa thought so, too. He looked up in my face, then he slowly raised his feeble hand and laid it on mine. He struggled to speak, and I bent my ear close to him to listen. "Good-bye, Kate," he whispered, very low; "Good-bye, dear; your hero was the real thing, after all. I wish I could have done something—amends—too late." Slower and slower the last words fell from his lips in broken whispers. He looked up kindly into my face, then he shivered, and

the light in his eyes seemed to go out all at once ; then he was quite still.

“Come, Miss Malcolm. We cannot delay another moment. The fire will be upon us directly. Come.” It was the same officer who had spoken to me before who spoke again. Mechanically I obeyed him. I kissed poor papa’s cold brow just once—then I laid him gently down. The officer helped me, and I rose. Then he led me to the window and assisted me out.

I can recall no more of the events of that awful night. A strange wild medley of sights and sounds, all of them ghastly and terrible, remains vaguely in my mind, but nothing can be clearly recalled that took place either then or for weeks afterwards. The last sight I was clearly conscious of was papa’s dead face as I kissed him and laid him down on the pillow in the old study, the other end of which was already filled with smoke and flames.

When I got better again they told me that it was May, and that I was in Sydney. How I came there I never knew, but I found that I had been treated as a daughter or a sister at Government House all through the terrible brain fever which had followed on the terrors of that awful night.

My very first visitor, as soon as I was well enough to see any one, was my old doctor of the “Torres Vedras.” He was just as kind and as funny as ever. The very first thing he did was to look at me with tears glistening in his eyes ; the very first thing he said was, “Dear me, Miss Malcolm, more illustrations of error. We could have found plenty here without dragging you into it. But there—error would only be half error unless it involved the wrong people as well as the wrong things.” He used to come to see me often

after that, and it was he who told me all about him. He was still desperately ill. The doctors all said he would be almost sure to die, or if he lived at all he would perhaps never know anything again; but my doctor said that was all nonsense. "Only another illustration, my dear," he would say, and then he would look the other way and take off his spectacles and rub them very hard with his handkerchief before he looked at me again. I almost think he must have guessed; but yet, how could he?

Gradually I got quite strong and well again in body, but somehow I could hardly believe it. Life seemed to have grown so lifeless,—such a strange, blank thing, without any object or meaning in it. The governor was an old friend of papa's, and he was very good to me. Gradually he began to talk to me about what I should do, and he advised me to let everything that papa had in this country be sold and go home again to auntie, with whom I had lived so long. Of course I said "yes," and asked him to be so kind as to get it all done for me, and he did. At last one day he told me it was all arranged and I should only have to sign some papers when I was twenty-one years old. I think he expected me to be in a hurry to go home, and perhaps he was surprised that I didn't seem so. Of course he didn't know the real reason—how could he?—and I couldn't tell him.

Since I had got better only one thing really interested me at all. Of course I knew that people wouldn't understand, so I was forced to say nothing about it, but perhaps I thought about it all the more on that account. He was alive still, and my doctor said he was getting better. As long as there was a hope of that there was something left worth living for. I had heard

all the story from the doctor—the very saddest and most beautiful story in all the world, I think. And nobody knew all of it but myself. Mr. Pinnock had been murdered on that awful night; Mr. Turner had been killed; the prisoners had either been killed or dispersed then and executed afterwards; and poor Joe was dead. Nobody was left who knew all but myself.

I seemed to think of nothing else. If he would only recover! If I could only see him once more, just to tell him what papa said at the very last; just to beg that he would forgive us the awful wrongs we had done him.

This was why I had delayed a little longer. This was the reason I seemed in no hurry to go back to dear old auntie again. I couldn't tell much of this even to the doctor; but I did tell him a little. I told him how grateful I felt to Mr. Fortescue for his brave defence of papa and myself. I told him that as soon as he was well enough I should like to see him to thank him just once. He said he quite understood. I wonder if he really did. Sometimes I was almost afraid he might. In spite of the Philosophy of Error he was very shrewd and quick, and sometimes I fancied there was a curious gleam in his eye when he talked about his patient. Oh, I do hope he did not.

At last he told me that he felt sure Mr. Fortescue would soon be himself again. I am afraid I cried a little when I heard it, but I don't think he saw me. He was only polishing his spectacles and looking at the ships in harbor, as he had a habit of doing when we were talking. I recovered myself almost in a moment and I said, "Well, doctor, you know when he is well enough I am to see him that I may say good-bye and thank him."

"Yes," he said, quietly, "Yes, I remember. I mean you to see him once, at any rate, before you leave us."

That was all he said then, but a few days after, when he was leaving, he asked me if I could be ready to come over to the hospital if he sent for me any afternoon. I said "yes," of course, but I confess I began to feel dreadfully frightened of seeing him again. What could I say when I did see him? I knew I had to beg forgiveness for poor papa and for all of us, and I shouldn't have minded a bit begging it on my bended knees. It wasn't that. Nothing could be too much to do in that way. But he—he might not care about remembering it at all. Like a terrible nightmare, he might be only too glad to forget all about it and about all of us. So I waited in suspense, longing for, and yet dreading beyond everything, the doctor's summons.

And it was all so different—so different. It was one afternoon about the middle of July. There had been showers of rain and gleams—oh, such bright gleams!—of sunshine between, when I was sent for at last. The nurse—she was such a kind old person, and seemed to be so fond of him—asked me to make haste. We walked quickly across the grounds without speaking at all, till she brought me into the house. Then the doctor came to me. He wouldn't look at me, but whether that was for my sake or his own I don't know; he only said, rather gruffly, I thought, "Take off your hat and come with me." I did what he bade me, though my hands trembled so that I could hardly get it off. Then we went along a passage. Then he opened a door and held it open for me to go in.

It was his room, and he was there. He didn't see me at first. His bed was turned the other way, and I

could see that he was lying propped up with pillows. His face was very thin, and, oh, so dreadfully pale! On the bed there were two letters; I seemed in a moment to know somehow what they were—the letters he had taken from papa's hand that night. I looked at him, and all my fears went away at once. I could remember only the face I had seen bending over me when I woke from my faint on horseback; I seemed to feel somehow the touch of his lips once more on my hand as I had felt it that day at the gate of the home paddock. I was no longer afraid. I said his name; I dare say my voice trembled a little, but he heard it. He turned his head round; he looked at me with such eyes, so full of hopeless sorrow for the past, it seemed—so full of despair, I thought, for the future.

I forgot about asking for pardon; I forgot my petition for forgiveness for papa and all of us. I only thought how sad he was; I only wanted to do something to comfort him. I stretched out my hand to him across the bed. With a low cry, a cry that sounded like hunger, he grasped it in his long white fingers. Then he bent his noble head forward, and great tears dropped on my hand—on mine!

I couldn't move. I couldn't turn away; least of all could I have spoken just then. I glanced at the doctor, that he might understand why I stayed so, but he only smiled and left the room, closing the door behind him silently.

At last he looked up, and in his eyes there was the same radiant light that I had seen there twice before. I felt confused. I don't know how I looked, but I said, hurriedly,—

“Oh, Mr. Jenkins—I—I beg pardon—Mr. Fortescue—I am so sorry!”

"Sorry," he repeated, "sorry for me? Yes, you may well be that, for I have failed—failed in everything."

"Failed!" I exclaimed, and I know my face must have flushed crimson when I said it. "Failed! No! No one ever succeeded if you have failed! Oh, I did so want to tell you how much papa wished he could have lived to make some little amends! I wanted to tell you that if I could—if I were only a man—I would show you what I think—I would know how to thank you for all your goodness."

I stopped—I was obliged to stop—as I spoke he gazed so strangely into my face. As he looked, his eyes seemed to grow brighter and brighter as if with a kind of glory.

"No," he whispered, "No. If you were a man you could not! Is it wildly possible that, in spite of all, you will?"

What did he mean? What could he mean? His eyes seemed to hold me fast. I couldn't look away for a moment, yet just then I would have given worlds to look away and recover myself.

"How?" I managed to say, at last. "How? what do you mean? What can I do?"

"Ah," he exclaimed, "is it, can it be really true?" As he spoke he threw his weak arms round me. He drew me towards him.

"Rescued," he whispered, as he kissed me again and again, "rescued."

THE END.

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